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BY LEON H. VINCENT

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AMERICAN LITERARY MASTERS



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BY LEON H. VINCENT



BOSTON AND NEW YORK  
HOUGHTON, MIFFLIN AND COMPANY

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TO

GEORGE EDWARD WOODBERRY



## PREFACE

*The nineteen men of letters whose work is reviewed in this volume represent an important half-century of our national literary life. The starting-point is the year 1809, the date of "A History of New York by Diedrich Knickerbocker." No author is included whose reputation does not rest, in part, on some notable book published before 1860.*

*Readers of modern French criticism will not need to be told that the plan of dividing the studies into short sections was taken from Faguet's admirable "Dix-Septième Siècle."*

*I am indebted for many helpful criticisms to Mr. James R. Foy, to Miss Mary Charlotte Priest, and especially to Mr. Lindsay Swift of the Boston Public Library.*

*L. H. V.*

*January 23, 1906.*





# Contents

## WASHINGTON IRVING

I. <i>His Life</i>	3
II. <i>His Character</i>	10
III. <i>The Writer</i>	13
IV. <i>Early Work: Knickerbocker's History, Sketch Book, Bracebridge Hall, Tales of a Traveller</i>	14
V. <i>Historical Writings: Columbus, Conquest of Granada, Mahomet</i>	20
VI. <i>Spanish Romance: The Alhambra, Legends of the Conquest of Spain</i>	24
VII. <i>American History and Travel: A Tour on the Prairies, Astoria, Life of Washington</i>	27

## WILLIAM CULLEN BRYANT

I. <i>His Life</i>	35
II. <i>His Character</i>	44
III. <i>The Literary Craftsman</i>	46
IV. <i>The Poet</i>	50
V. <i>Latest Poetical Work: The Iliad and the Odyssey</i>	58

## JAMES FENIMORE COOPER

I. <i>His Life</i>	65
II. <i>His Character</i>	72
III. <i>The Writer</i>	74

IV. <i>Romances of the American Revolution : The Spy, Lionel Lincoln</i>	75
V. <i>The Leather-Stocking Tales and Other Indian Stories</i>	77
VI. <i>The Sea Stories from The Pilot to Miles Wallingford</i>	82
VII. <i>Old-World Romance and New-World Satire : The Bravo, The Heidenmauer, The Headsman, Homeward Bound, Home as Found</i>	89
VIII. <i>Travels, History, Political Writings, and Latest Novels</i>	93
GEORGE BANCROFT	
I. <i>His Life</i>	101
II. <i>His Character</i>	108
III. <i>The Writer</i>	110
IV. <i>The History of the United States</i>	113
WILLIAM HICKLING PRESCOTT	
I. <i>His Life</i>	123
II. <i>His Character</i>	128
III. <i>The Writer</i>	130
IV. <i>The Histories</i>	132
RALPH WALDO EMERSON	
I. <i>His Life</i>	147
II. <i>His Character</i>	157
III. <i>The Writer</i>	159
IV. <i>Nature, Addresses, and Lectures</i>	160
V. <i>The Essays, Representative Men, English Traits, Conduct of Life</i>	166

# CONTENTS

xi

VI.	<i>The Poems</i>	176
VII.	<i>Latest Books</i>	182

## EDGAR ALLAN POE

I.	<i>His Life</i>	189
II.	<i>His Character</i>	198
III.	<i>The Prose Writer</i>	201
IV.	<i>Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque</i>	203
V.	<i>The Critic</i>	211
VI.	<i>The Poet</i>	215

## HENRY WADSWORTH LONGFELLOW

I.	<i>His Life</i>	221
II.	<i>His Character</i>	228
III.	<i>The Poet</i>	230
IV.	<i>Outre-Mer, Hyperion, Kavanagh</i>	233
V.	<i>Voices of the Night, Ballads, Spanish Student, Belfry of Bruges, The Seaside and the Fireside</i>	236
VI.	<i>Evangeline, Hiawatha, Miles Standish, Tales of a Wayside Inn</i>	240
VII.	<i>Christus, Judas Maccabæus, Pandora, Michael Angelo</i>	245
VIII.	<i>Last Works</i>	249

## JOHN GREENLEAF WHITTIER

I.	<i>His Life</i>	255
II.	<i>His Character</i>	264
III.	<i>The Literary Craftsman</i>	266
IV.	<i>Narrative and Legendary Verse</i>	269
V.	<i>Voices of Freedom, Songs of Labor, In War Time</i>	273

- VI. *Snow-Bound, Tent on the Beach, Pennsylvania Pilgrim, Vision of Echard* 277

### NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE

- I. *His Life* 287  
 II. *His Character* 293  
 III. *The Writer* 296  
 IV. *The Short Stories: Twice-Told Tales, Mosses from an Old Manse, The Snow-Image* 298  
 V. *The Great Romances: Scarlet Letter, House of the Seven Gables, Blithedale Romance, Marble Faun* 302  
 VI. *Latest and Posthumous Writings: Our Old Home, Note-Books, Dolliver Romance* 314

### HENRY DAVID THOREAU

- I. *His Life* 321  
 II. *His Character* 325  
 III. *The Writer* 327  
 IV. *The Books* 328

### OLIVER WENDELL HOLMES

- I. *His Life* 337  
 II. *The Man* 341  
 III. *The Writer* 344  
 IV. *The Autocrat and its Companions, Over the Teacups, Our Hundred Days in Europe* 345  
 V. *The Poet* 349  
 VI. *Fiction and Biography* 352

### JOHN LOTHROP MOTLEY

- I. *His Life* 359  
 II. *His Character* 365



# CONTENTS

xiii

III. *The Writer* 367

IV. *The Histories* 369

## FRANCIS PARKMAN

I. *His Life* 379

II. *His Character* 383

III. *The Writer* 385

IV. *Early Work: Oregon Trail, Conspiracy of  
Pontiac, Vassall Morton* 387

V. *France and England in North America* 390

## BAYARD TAYLOR

I. *His Life* 401

II. *His Character* 407

III. *The Artist* 409

IV. *Poetical Works* 410

## GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

I. *His Life* 417

II. *The Man* 423

III. *The Writer and the Orator* 424

IV. *Nile Notes of a Howadji, Prue and I,  
Trumps* 427

V. *The Easy Chair* 430

VI. *Orations and Addresses* 433

## DONALD GRANT MITCHELL

I. *His Life* 439

II. *The Author and the Man* 442

III. *The Writings* 444

JAMES RUSSELL LOWELL 451

I. *His Life* 453

II.	<i>Lowell's Character</i>	461
III.	<i>Poet and Prose Writer</i>	463
IV.	<i>Poems, The Biglow Papers, Fable for Critics, Vision of Sir Launfal</i>	465
V.	<i>Under the Willows, The Cathedral, Commemoration Ode, Three Memorial Poems, Heartsease and Rue</i>	469
VI.	<i>Fireside Travels, My Study Windows, Among my Books, Latest Literary Essays</i>	474
VII.	<i>Political Addresses and Papers</i>	479
WALT WHITMAN		
I.	<i>His Life</i>	485
II.	<i>The Growth of a Reputation</i>	490
III.	<i>The Writer</i>	492
IV.	<i>Leaves of Grass</i>	494
V.	<i>Specimen Days and Collect</i>	503
VI.	<i>Whitman's Character</i>	504

I

*Washington Irving*



# Washington Irving

## I

### HIS LIFE

SCOTCH and English blood flowed in Washington Irving's veins. His father, William Irving (whose ancestry has been traced by genealogical enthusiasts to De Irwyn, armor-bearer to Robert Bruce), was a native of Shapinsha, one of the Orkney Islands; his mother, Sarah (Sanders) Irving, came from Falmouth.

At the time of his marriage William Irving was a petty officer on an armed packet-ship plying between Falmouth and New York. Two years later (1763) he gave up seafaring, settled in New York, and started a mercantile business. He enjoyed a competency, but like other patriotic citizens suffered from the demoralization of trade during the

[E. A. Duyckinck]: *Irvingiana, a Memorial of Washington Irving*, 1860.

W. C. Bryant: *A Discourse on the Life, Character, and Genius of Washington Irving*, 1860.

Pierre M. Irving: *The Life and Letters of Washington Irving*, 1862-64.

C. D. Warner: *The Work of Washington Irving*, 1893.

## WASHINGTON IRVING

Revolution. His character suggested that of the old Scotch covenanter. Though not without tenderness, he was in the main strict and puritanical.

Washington Irving was born in New York on April 3, 1783. He was the youngest of a family of eleven, five of whom died in childhood. Irving could perfectly remember the great patriot for whom he was named. He was much indebted to the good old Scotchwoman, his nurse, who, seeing Washington enter a shop on Broadway, darted in after him and presented her small charge with 'Please your Excellency, here's a bairn that's 'called after ye!' 'General Washington,' said Irving, recounting the incident in after years, 'then 'turned his benevolent face full upon me, smiled, 'laid his hand on my head, and gave me his blessing. . . . I was but five years old, yet I can feel 'that hand upon my head even now.'

Up to the age of fifteen Irving attended such schools as New York afforded. He was not precocious. He came home from school one day (he was then about eight) and remarked to his mother: 'The madame says I am a dunce; is n't it a pity?'

Two of his brothers had been sent to Columbia College; that he was not, may be attributed partly to ill health, partly to an indolent waywardness of disposition and to the indulgence so often granted the youngest member of a large family. Always an inveterate reader, he contrived in time to educate himself by methods unapproved of



## IRVING'S LIFE

pedagogical science. He decided on a legal career and entered the office of a well-known practitioner, Henry Masterton. During the two years he was there he acquired some law and attained 'considerable proficiency in belles-lettres.' He studied for a time with Brockholst Livingston (afterwards judge of the Supreme Court), and later with Josiah Ogden Hoffman.

As a boy Irving had always 'scribbled' more or less, and in 1802 he scribbled to some purpose, contributing the 'Jonathan Oldstyle' letters to the 'Morning Chronicle,' a paper founded and edited by his brother Peter Irving. His ambitions seemed likely to be frustrated by poor health, and a trip abroad was advised. He went to the Mediterranean, visited Italy, and spent a little time in France and England. The journey was not without adventures. He saw Nelson's fleet on its way to Trafalgar; his boat was overhauled by pirates near Elba; and in Rome he met Madame de Staël, who almost overpowered him by her amazing volubility and the pertinacity of her questioning.

On his return home Irving passed his examinations (November, 1806), and was admitted to the bar with but slender legal outfit, as he frankly confessed. He was enrolled among the counsel for the defence at the trial of Aaron Burr at Richmond. There was no thought of taxing his untried legal skill; he was to be useful to the cause as a writer in case his services were needed.

## WASHINGTON IRVING

Law gave place to literature. Irving and J. K. Paulding projected a paper, *Salmagundi*, to be 'mainly characterized by a spirit of fun and sarcastic drollery.' William T. Irving joined in the venture. The first number appeared on January 24, 1807. The editors issued it when they were so minded, and after publishing twenty numbers, brought it to an almost unceremonious close.

The following year Peter and Washington Irving began writing a burlesque account of their native town, a parody on Mitchill's *A Picture of New York*. Peter was called to Liverpool to take charge of the English interests of Irving and Smith, and it fell to Washington to recast the chapters already written and complete the narrative. The book outgrew the design (as is the tendency of parodies), and was published on December 6, 1809, as *A History of New York from the Beginning of the World to the End of the Dutch Dynasty, by Diedrich Knickerbocker*. It was received by the New York Historical Society, to whom it was dedicated, with astonishment, and by the old Dutch families with mingled emotions, among which that of exuberant delight was not in every case the most prominent.

For two years Irving conducted the 'Analectic Magazine,' published in Philadelphia. During the exciting months which followed the British attack on Washington (August, 1814), he was military secretary to the governor of New York. Being of adventurous spirit, he welcomed with joy the pros-

## IRVING'S LIFE

pect of accompanying his friend Stephen Decatur on the expedition to Algiers. Disappointed in this and unable to get the fever of travel out of his blood, he sailed for England (May, 1815), intending nothing more than a visit to his brother in Liverpool and to a married sister in Birmingham.

Peter Irving had been ill, and in consequence his affairs had fallen into disorder. Washington undertook to disentangle them. He was unsuccessful. To the intense mortification of the brothers they were compelled to go into bankruptcy (1818), and Washington began casting about for a way to supplement his slender income. He refused an advantageous offer at home, and determined to remain in England. A literary project had taken shape in his mind, and he proceeded to carry it out.

In May, 1819, Irving published the first part of *The Sketch Book of Geoffrey Crayon*, containing five papers, one of which, 'Rip Van Winkle,' is a little masterpiece. The attitude of the public towards this venture convinced Irving that he might live by the profession of letters. *The Sketch Book* was followed by *Bracebridge Hall, or the Humorists* (1822), and by the *Tales of a Traveller* (1824). This last date marks a period in Irving's literary life.

The years which Irving spent abroad had their anxieties, their depressions, their dull days, their long periods of drudgery. It is a temptation to

## WASHINGTON IRVING

dwell on their pleasures and their triumphs. Irving was fortunate in his friendships. He knew Scott, Campbell, Moore, and Jeffrey, and had the amusement on one occasion of seeing his visiting list revised by Rogers. He met Mrs. Siddons, marvelled at Belzoni, was amused by the antics of Lady Caroline Lamb, breakfasted at Holland House, and visited Thomas Hope at his country seat. In Paris he was presented to Talma by John Howard Payne, 'the young American Roscius of former days,' who had now 'outgrown all tragic symmetry.' He became (in time) *persona grata* to John Murray, his English publisher; and to be dear to one's publisher must always be accounted among the great rewards of literature.

At the instance of Alexander Everett, the American Minister to Spain, Irving, in February, 1826, went to Madrid to translate Navarrete's forthcoming collection of documents relating to Columbus. He presently abandoned the plan for a more grateful task, the writing of an independent account of the discovery of America, based on Navarrete, and on ample materials supplied by the library of Rich, the American consul at Madrid. To this he devoted himself with immense energy. The work was published in 1828, and was soon followed by the *Conquest of Granada* and *Voyages of the Companions of Columbus*.

In 1829 Irving became Secretary of the American Legation in London. The Royal Society of

## IRVING'S LIFE

Literature voted him one of their fifty guinea gold medals, in recognition of his services to the study of history. The honor, distinguished in itself, became doubly so to the recipient because the other of the two awards for that year was bestowed on Hallam. In June, 1830, the University of Oxford conferred on Irving the degree of LL. D. In April, 1832, he sailed for America. He had been absent seventeen years.

After travels in various parts of the United States, including a long journey to the far West with the commissioner to the Indian tribes, Irving settled near Tarrytown. His home was a little Dutch cottage 'all made up of gable ends, and 'as full of angles and corners as an old cocked 'hat.' Familiarly called 'The Roost' by its inmates, this 'doughty and valorous little pile' is known to the world as 'Sunnyside.' With the exception of the four years (1842-46) he passed in Spain as Minister Plenipotentiary, 'Sunnyside' was Irving's abiding-place until his death.

His later writings are: *The Alhambra*, 1832; *The Crayon Miscellany* (comprising *A Tour on the Prairies*, *Abbotsford* and *Newstead Abbey*, and *Legends of the Conquest of Spain*), 1835; *Astoria* (with Pierre M. Irving), 1836; *Adventures of Captain Bonneville, U. S. A.* (edited), 1837; *Life of Goldsmith*, 1849; *Mahomet and his Successors*, 1849-50; *The Chronicles of Wolfert's Roost*, 1855; *The Life of Washington*, 1855-59.



## WASHINGTON IRVING

Attempts were made to draw Irving into political life. He was offered a nomination for Congress; Tammany Hall 'unanimously and vociferously' declared him its candidate for mayor of New York; and President Van Buren would have made him Secretary of the Navy. All these honors he felt himself obliged to refuse. He accepted the Spanish mission (offered by President Tyler at the instance of his Secretary of State, Daniel Webster), because he believed himself not wholly unfitted for the charge, and because it honored in him the profession of letters.

Irving's intellectual powers were at perfect command up to the beginning of the last year of his life. Then his health began to fail markedly, and the final volume of his *Washington* cost him effort he could ill afford. He died suddenly on November 28, 1859, and was buried in the cemetery at Sleepy Hollow.

## II

### IRVING'S CHARACTER

IRVING was broad-minded, tolerant, amiable, incapable of envy, quick to forget an affront, and always willing to think the best of humanity. His tactfulness was due in part to his large experience of life, but more to the possession of a nature that was sweet, serene, frank, and unsophisticated. For



## IRVING'S CHARACTER

Irving was no courtier ; he could as little flatter as practise the more odious forms of deceit. His gifts of irony and ridicule, supplemented with an extraordinary power of humorous delineation, were never abused. It might be said of him, as of another great satirist, that 'he never inflicted a wound.'

His modesty was excessive. It is impossible to find in his writings or his correspondence any hint that he was inclined to put unusual value on his work. Grateful as he was for praise, it would never have occurred to him that he had a right to it. With all his knowledge of the world he was singularly diffident. Moore hit off this trait when he said that Geoffrey Crayon was 'not strong as a lion, but delightful as a domestic animal.'

Not his least admirable virtue was a spirit of helpfulness where his brother authors were concerned. Irving was 'officious' in the good old sense of the word, glad to be of service to his fellows, untiring in efforts to promote their welfare. He could praise their work, too, without disheartening qualifications. The good he enjoyed, the bad he put to one side. And he never forgot a kindness. A publisher who had once befriended him, though fallen on evil days, found himself still able to command some of Irving's best manuscripts.

Criticism never angered Irving. Personal attacks (of which he had his share) were suffered with quiet

## WASHINGTON IRVING

dignity. He rarely defended himself, and then only when the attack was outrageous. He could speak pointedly if the need were. His reply to William Leggett, who accused him in 'The Plain Dealer' of 'literary pusillanimity' and double dealing, is a model of effectiveness. One paragraph will show its quality. Imputing no malevolence to Leggett, who doubtless acted from honest feelings hastily excited by a misapprehension of the facts, Irving says: 'You have been a little too eager to give an instance of that "plain dealing" which you have recently adopted as your war-cry. Plain dealing, sir, is a great merit when accompanied by magnanimity, and exercised with a just and generous spirit; but if pushed too far, and made the excuse for indulging every impulse of passion or prejudice, it may render a man, especially in your situation, a very offensive, if not a very mischievous member of the community.'

Something may be known of a man by observing his attitude at the approach of old age. Irving's beautiful serenity was characteristic. People were kind to him, but he thought their kindness extraordinary. He wondered whether old gentlemen were becoming fashionable.

# IRVING THE WRITER

## III

### THE WRITER

IRVING's prose is distinguished for grace and sweetness. It is unostentatious, natural, easy. At its best it comes near to being a model of good prose. The most striking effects are produced by the simplest means. Never does the writer appear to be searching for an out-of-the-way term. He accepts what lies at hand. The word in question is almost obvious and often conventional, but invariably apt.

For a writer who produced so much the style is remarkably homogeneous. It is an exaggeration to speak of it as overcharged with color. There are passages of much splendor, but Irving's taste was too refined to admit of his indulging in rhetorical excesses. Nor is the style quite so mellifluous as it seemed to J. W. Croker, who said: 'I can no more go on all day with one of his [Irving's] books than I could go on all day sucking a sugar-plum.' The truth is that Irving is one of the most human and companionable of writers, and his English is just the sort to prompt one to go on all day with him.

Yet there is a want of ruggedness, the style is almost too perfectly controlled. It lacks the strength and energy born of deep thought and passionate conviction, and it must be praised (as it may be without reserve) for urbanity and masculine grace.

# WASHINGTON IRVING

## IV

### EARLY WORK

*KNICKERBOCKER'S HISTORY, SKETCH BOOK,  
BRACEBRIDGE HALL, TALES OF A TRAVELLER*

THE dignified appearance of Diedrich Knickerbocker's learned work, the quiet simplicity of the principal title, and the sober dedication gave no hint to the serious-minded that they were buying one of the most extraordinary books of humor in the English language. The deception could not last long, but it is to be hoped that on the day of publication some honest seeker after knowledge took a copy home with the intent to profit at once by its stores of erudition.

On a basis of historical truth Irving reared a delightfully grotesque historical edifice. The method is analogous to that children employ when they put a candle on the floor that they may laugh at the odd shadows of themselves cast on wall and ceiling. The figures are monstrous, distorted, yet always resembling. Nothing could be at once more lifelike and more unreal than Irving's account of New Amsterdam and its people under the three Dutch governors.

Here is a world of amusement to be had for the asking. One reader will enjoy the ironical philosophy, another the sly thrusts at current politics,

## THE SKETCH BOOK

a third the boisterous fun of certain episodes, such as the fight between stout Risingh and Peter Stuyvesant, the hint of which may have been caught from Fielding's account of how Molly Seagrim valorously put her enemies to flight. But the book will always be most cherished for its quaint pictures of snug and drowsy comfort, for its world of broad-bottomed burghers, amphibious housewives, and demure Dutch damsels wooed by inarticulate lovers smoking long pipes, and for the rich Indian summer atmosphere with which the poet-humorist invested the scenes of a not wholly idyllic past.

*The Sketch Book of Geoffrey Crayon* is in one respect well named; it has the heterogeneous character that we associate with an artist's portfolio. Notes of travel, stories, meditations, and portraits are thrown together in pleasant disorder. A paper on 'Roscoe' is followed by the sketch entitled 'The Wife,' and the history of 'Rip Van Winkle' is succeeded by an essay on the attitude of English writers towards America. In another sense the volume is not a mere sketch-book, for each sketch is a highly finished picture. Here is often a self-consciousness radically unlike the abandon of the *History of New York*. At times Irving falls quite into the 'Keepsake' manner. A faint aroma as of withered rose leaves steals from the pages, a languid atmosphere of sweet melancholy dear to the early Nineteenth Century.

## WASHINGTON IRVING

Other pages are breezy enough. The five chapters on Christmas at Bracebridge Hall, the essay on 'Little Britain,' on the 'Mutability of Literature,' and that on 'John Bull' are emphatically not in the 'Keepsake' vein. Of themselves they would have sufficed to redeem *The Sketch Book* from the worst charge that can be brought against a piece of literature, — the charge of being merely fashionable. But the extraordinary vitality which this book has enjoyed for eighty-five years it owes in the main to 'Rip Van Winkle' and 'The Legend of Sleepy Hollow.' Written in small form, embodying simple incidents, saturated with humor, classic in their conciseness of style, these stories are faultless examples of Irving's art.

Irving dearly loved a lovable vagabond, and Rip is his ideal. The story is told in a succession of pictures. The reader visualizes scenery, character, incident, the purple mountains, the village nestling at their feet, the ne'er-do-weel whom children love, the termagant wife, the junto before the inn door, the journey into the mountains, the strange little beings at their solemn game, the draught of the fatal liquor, the sleep, the awakening, the return home, the bewilderment, the recognition, — do we not know it by heart? Have we not read the narrative a hundred times, trying in vain to penetrate the secret of its perfection? Something of the logic of poetry went into the creation of this idyl. We are left with the feeling



## BRACEBRIDGE HALL

that Irving himself could not have changed a word for the better.

'The Legend of Sleepy Hollow' is etched with a deeper stroke, is broader, more farcical. There is no pathos, but downright fun and frolic from the first line to the last. The audacious exaggeration of every feature in the portrait of Ichabod Crane is inimitably clever. The schoolmaster gets no pity and needs none. And the reader is justified in his unsympathetic attitude when later he learns that Ichabod, instead of having been carried off by the headless Hessian, merely changed his quarters, and when last heard of had studied law, written for the newspapers, and gone into politics.

In *Bracebridge Hall* Geoffrey Crayon returns to the English country house where he had spent a Christmas, to enjoy at leisure old manners, old customs, old-world ideas and people. Never were simpler materials used in the making of a book; never was a more entertaining book compounded of such simple materials. The incidents are of the most quiet sort, a walk, a dinner, a visit to a neighboring grange or to a camp of gypsies, a reading in the library or the telling of a story after dinner. The philosophy is naïve, but the humor is exquisite and unflagging.

The reader meets his old friends, the Squire, Master Simon, old Christy, and the Oxonian. New characters are introduced, Lady Lillycraft

## WASHINGTON IRVING

and General Harbottle, Ready-money Jack, Slingsby the schoolmaster, and the Radical who reads Cobbett, and goes armed with pamphlets and arguments. Among them all none is more attractive than the Squire. With his scorn of commercialism, his love of ancient customs, his good-humored tolerance of gypsies and poachers, with his body of maxims from Peacham and other old writers, and his amusing contempt for Lord Chesterfield — these and other delightful traits make Mr. Bracebridge one of the most ingratiating characters in fiction.

*Bracebridge Hall* contains interpolated stories, the 'Stout Gentleman,' the 'Student of Salamanca,' and the finely finished tale of 'Annette Delabarre.' The papers of Diedrich Knickerbocker are not yet exhausted; having furnished Rip and Ichabod to *The Sketch Book* they now contribute to *Bracebridge Hall* the story of 'Dolph Heyliger.'

The *Tales of a Traveller*, a medley of episodes and sketches, is divided into four parts. In the first part the Nervous Gentleman of Bracebridge Hall continues his narrations. These adventures, supposed to have been told at a hunt dinner, or at breakfast the following morning, are intertwined, Arabian Nights fashion, story within story. They are grotesque (the 'Bold Dragoon,' with the richly humorous account of the dance of the furniture), or weird and ghastly (the 'German Student'), or romantic (the 'Young Italian').

## TALES OF A TRAVELLER

The second part, 'Buckthorne and his Friends,' displays the seamy side of English dramatic and literary life. Modern realism had not yet been invented, and it is easy to laugh over the sorrows of Flimsy, who, in his coat of Lord Townley cut and dingy-white stockinet pantaloons, bears a closer relation to Mr. Vincent Crummles than to any one of the characters of *A Mummer's Wife*.

Part third, the 'Italian Banditti,' is in a style which no longer interests, though many worse written narratives do. But in the last part, 'The Money-Diggers,' Irving comes back to his own. He is again wandering along the shores of the pleasant island of Mannahatta, fishing at Helle-gat, lying under the trees at Corlear Hook while a Cape Cod whaler tells the story of 'The Devil and Tom Walker.' Ramm Rapelye fills his chair at the club and smokes and grunts, ever maintaining a mastiff-like gravity. Once more we see the little old city which had not entirely lost its picturesque Dutch features. Here stands Wolfert Webber's house, with its gable end of yellow brick turned toward the street. 'The gigantic sun-flowers loll their broad jolly faces over the fences, 'seeming to ogle most affectionately the passers-by.' Dirk Waldron, 'the son of four fathers,' sits in Webber's kitchen, feasting his eyes on the opulent charms of Amy. He says nothing, but at intervals fills the old cabbage-grower's pipe, strokes the tortoise-shell cat, or replenishes the teapot

## WASHINGTON IRVING

from the bright copper kettle singing before the fire. 'All these quiet little offices may seem of 'trifling import; but when true love is translated 'into Low Dutch, it is in this way it eloquently 'expresses itself.'

Had Irving's reputation depended on the four books just now characterized, it would have been a great reputation and the note of originality precisely what we now find it. But there was need of work in other fields to show the catholicity of his interests and the range of his powers.

### V

## HISTORICAL WRITINGS

### COLUMBUS, CONQUEST OF GRANADA, MAHOMET

THE *Life and Voyages of Columbus* is written in the spirit of tempered hero-worship. It is free from the extravagance of partisans who make a god of Columbus, and from the skeptical cavillings of those who apparently are not unwilling to rob the great explorer of any claim he may possess to virtue or ability. As Irving conceives him, Columbus is a many-sided man, infinitely patient when patience is required, doggedly obstinate if the need be, crafty or open, daring in the highest degree, having that audacity which seems

## *LIFE OF COLUMBUS*

to quell the powers of nature, yet devout, with a touch of the superstition characteristic of his time and his belief.

On many questions, fine points of ethnography, geography, navigation and the like, Irving neither could nor did he presume to speak finally. History has to be rewritten every few years wherever these questions are involved. But the letters of Columbus, the testimony of his contemporaries, the reports of friend and enemy, throw an unchanging light on character. The march of science can neither dim nor augment that light. Irving was emphatically a judge of human nature. He needed no help in making up his mind what sort of man Columbus was. Modern scholars with their magnificent scientific equipment sometimes forget that cartography, invaluable though it is, is after all a poor guide to character. And yet, by the testimony of one of those same modern scholars, Irving's life of the Admiral, as a trustworthy and popular résumé, is still the best.

One often wishes Irving had been less temperate. The barbarous tyranny of the Spaniards over the Indians of Hispaniola stirs the reader to deepest indignation. He longs for such treatment of the theme as Carlyle might possibly have given. Here is need of thunderbolts of wrath like unto those wielded by the Jupiter Tonans of history. But taken as a whole, the book has extraordinary virtues. It is a clear, full, well-ordered, picturesque,



## WASHINGTON IRVING

and readable narrative of the great explorer's career. There is no better, nor is there likely to be a better. He who has time to read but one book on the discoverer of America will not go amiss in reading this one. He who proposes to read many books on the subject may well elect to read Irving's first.

The supplementary *Voyages of the Companions of Columbus* narrates the adventures of Ojeda, that dare-devil of the high seas, of Nicuesa, of Vasco Nuñez, of Ponce de Leon. Though wanting the unity of the preceding volumes, these narratives are of high interest, and for vigor, animation, and picturesqueness must rank among the most attractive examples of Irving's work.

While making collateral studies bearing on the life of Columbus, Irving became so captivated with the romantic and chivalrous story of the fall of Granada that he found himself unable to complete his more sober task until he had sketched a rough outline of the new book. When the *Columbus* was sent to the press, Irving made a tour of Andalusia, visited certain memorable scenes of the war, and on his return to Seville elaborated his sketch into the ornate and glowing picture known as *A Chronicle of the Conquest of Granada*, by Fray Antonio Agapida.

The book is commonly described as romance rather than history. It was written with a view to rescuing the ancient chronicle of the conquest from

## CONQUEST OF GRANADA

the mass of amatory and sentimental tradition with which it was incrustcd, and of presenting it in its legitimate brilliancy. Irving believed, too, that the world had forgotten or had failed to realize how stern the conflict was. In the fifteenth century it was regarded as a Holy War. Christian bigot was arrayed against Moslem bigot. Atrocities of the blackest sort were perpetrated and justified in the name of religion. The title-page says that the narrative is taken from the manuscript of one Fray Antonio Agapida. The brother is an imaginary character, a personification of monkish zeal and intolerance. When the slaughter of the infidels has been unusually great, Fray Antonio makes his appearance, like the 'chorus' of a play, and thanks God with much unction. Through this mouth-piece Irving gives ironical voice to that sentiment it is impossible not to feel in contemplating the barbarities of a 'holy' war. A few readers were disturbed by the fiction of the old monk. They ought to have liked him. He is an amusing personage and comes too seldom on the stage.

The *Life of Mahomet and his Successors* has been spoken of as 'comparatively a failure.' If a book which sums up the available knowledge of the time on the subject, which is written in clear, pure English, which is throughout of high interest, in other words, which has solidity, beauty, and a large measure of the literary quality — if such a book is comparatively a failure, one hardly knows what can



## WASHINGTON IRVING

be the critic's standard of measurement. Irving was not acquainted with Arabic. He drew his materials from Spanish and German sources. Yet it is not too much to say that no better general account of Mahomet and the early caliphs has been written.

### VI

#### SPANISH ROMANCE

##### *THE ALHAMBRA, LEGENDS OF THE CONQUEST OF SPAIN*

FOR three or four months Irving lived in the ancient Moorish palace and fortress known as the Alhambra. In his own phrase he 'succeeded to 'the throne of Boabdil.' The place charmed him beyond all others in the Old World. His craving for antiquity, his love of the exotic, his passion for romance, his delight in day-dreaming were here completely satisfied. He loved the huge pile, so rough and forbidding without, so graceful and attractive within. The splendor of its storied past intoxicated him. He roamed at will through its courts and halls, steeping himself in history and tradition. He was amused at the life of the petty human creatures, nesting bird-like in the crannies and nooks of the vast edifice. To observe their habits, record their superstitious fancies, listen to their tales, sympathize with their ambitions or their

## TALES OF THE ALHAMBRA

sorrows, was occupation enough. The history of the place could be studied in the parchment-clad folios of the Jesuit library. As for the legends, they abounded everywhere. The scattered leaves were then brought together in the volume called *Tales of the Alhambra*.

It is a Spanish arabesque. No book displays to better advantage the wayward charm of Irving's literary genius. Whether recounting old stories of buried Moorish gold and Arabian necromancy, or describing the loves of Manuel and bright-eyed Dolores, or extolling the grace and intelligence of Carmen, he is equally happy. There was a needy and shiftless denizen of the place, one Mateo Ximenes, who captured Irving's heart by describing himself as 'a son of the Alhambra.' A ribbon-weaver by trade and an idler by choice, he attached himself to the newcomer and refused to be shaken off. If it was impossible to be rid of him, it was equally impossible not to like him. Life was a prolonged holiday for Mateo during Geoffrey Crayon's residence. Whatever obligations he had, of a domestic or a business nature, were joyfully set aside that he might wait upon the visitor. He became Irving's 'prime-minister' and 'historiographer-royal,' doing his errands, aiding in his explorations, and between times unfolding his accumulated treasures of legend and tradition. He was flattered by the credence given his stories, and when the reign of el rey Chico the

## WASHINGTON IRVING

second came to an end, no one lamented more than Mateo, left now 'to his old brown cloak and 'his starveling mystery of ribbon-weaving.'

Though not published until after Irving's return to America, *The Legends of the Conquest of Spain* is a part of the harvest of this same period. The book describes the decline of the Gothic power under Witiza and Roderick, the treason of Count Julian, the coming of the Arabians under Taric and Muza, and the downfall of Christian supremacy in the Spanish peninsula. Irving was a magician in handling words, and this volume is rich in proof of it. Here may be found passages of the utmost brilliancy, such as the description of Roderick's assault upon the necromantic tower of Hercules, and the opening of the golden casket.

The *Legends* serves a double purpose. As a book of entertainment pure and simple it is unsurpassed. It is also a spur to the reader to make his way into wider fields, and to learn yet more of that people whose history could give rise to these beautiful illustrations of chivalry and courage.

# TOUR ON THE PRAIRIES

## VII

### AMERICAN HISTORY AND TRAVEL

#### *A TOUR ON THE PRAIRIES, ASTORIA, LIFE OF WASHINGTON*

THE list of Irving's writings between 1835 and 1855 comprises eight titles. Two of these books have been commented on. The others may be despatched in a paragraph, as the old reviewers used to say.

*Abbotsford and Newstead Abbey* is an aftermath of the English harvest of impressions and experiences. The *Life of Goldsmith*, based originally on Prior's useful but heavy work, and rewritten when Forster's book appeared, is accounted one of the most graceful of literary biographies. *Wolfert's Roost* is a medley of delightful papers on birds, Indians, old Dutch villages, and modern American adventurers, together with a handful of Spanish stories and legends.

There is a group of three books dealing with American frontier life and western exploration. The first of these, *A Tour on the Prairies*, shows how readily the trained man of letters can turn his hand to any subject. Who would have thought that the prose poet of the Alhambra was also able to do justice to the trapper and the Pawnee? *Astoria* (the first draft of which was made by

## WASHINGTON IRVING

Pierre M. Irving) is an account of John Jacob Astor's commercial enterprise in the Northwest. Irving was amused when an English review pronounced the book his masterpiece. He had really taken a deeper interest in the work than he supposed possible when Astor urged it upon him. *Bonneville* in a manner supplements *Astoria*, and was written from notes and journals furnished by the hardy explorer whose name the book bears.

It was fitting that Irving should crown the literary labors of forty years with a life of Washington. He had a deep veneration for the memory of the great American. The theme was peculiarly grateful to him. He seems to have regarded the work as something more than a self-imposed and pleasant literary task — it was a duty to which he was in the highest degree committed, a duty at once pious and patriotic. Though he had begun early to ponder his subject, Irving was nearly seventy when he commenced the actual writing ; and notwithstanding the book far outgrew the original plan, he was able to bring it to a successful conclusion.

Three quarters of the first volume are devoted to Washington's history up to his thirty-second year. It is a graphic account of the young student, the surveyor, the envoy to the Indians, the captain of militia. Irving shows how it is possible to present the 'real' Washington without recourse to exaggerated realism. The remainder of the



## LIFE OF WASHINGTON

volume is given to an outline of the causes leading to the Revolution, to the affair of Lexington and Concord, the Battle of Bunker Hill, Washington's election to the post of commander-in-chief, and the beginning of military operations around Boston. The next three volumes are a history of the Revolutionary War, with Washington always the central figure. The fifth volume covers Washington's political life, and his last years at Mount Vernon.

Of two notable characteristics of this book, the first is its extraordinary readableness. To be sure the Revolution was a great event, and Irving was a gifted writer. Nevertheless for a historian who delights in movement, color, variety, the Revolutionary War must often seem no better than a desert of tedious fact relieved now and then by an oasis of brilliant exploit. Irving complained of the dulness of many parts of the theme. Notwithstanding this he brought to the work so much of his peculiar winsomeness that the *Washington* is a book always to be taken up with pleasure and laid down with regret.

The second notable characteristic is the freedom from extravagance either of praise or of blame. The crime and the disgrace of Arnold do not color adversely the historian's view of what Arnold was and did in 1776. No indignant partisan has told with greater pathos the story of André. Nothing could be more temperate than Irving's attitude

## WASHINGTON IRVING

towards the Tories, or, as it is now fashionable to call them, the Loyalists of the American Revolution. He could not deny sympathy to these unfortunates who found themselves caught between the upper and lower millstones, a people who in many cases were unable to go over heart and soul to the cause of the King, and who found it even more difficult to espouse the cause of their own countrymen. Even the enemies of Washington, that is to say, the enemies of his own political and military household, are treated with utmost fairness.

For Washington himself, Irving has only admiration, which, however, he is able to express without fulsome panegyric. He dwells on the great leader's magnanimity, on his evenness of temper, his infinite patience, his freedom from trace of vanity, self-interest, or sectional prejudice, his confidence in the justness of the cause, and his trust in Providence, a trust which faltered least when circumstances were most adverse. Irving admired unstintedly the warrior who could hold in check trained and seasoned European soldiers with 'an 'apparently undisciplined rabble,' the 'American 'Fabius' who, when the time was ripe, was found to possess 'enterprise as well as circumspection, 'energy as well as endurance.'

The personal side of the biography is not neglected, but no emphasis is laid on particulars of costume, manners, speech, what Washington ate and drank, and said about his neighbors. Irving



## CONCLUSION

could have had little sympathy with the modern rage for knowing the size of a great man's collar and the number of his footgear. The passion for such details is legitimate, but it is a passion which needs to be firmly controlled. In brief, throughout the work emphasis is laid where emphasis belongs, on the character of Washington, who was the soul of the Revolutionary War, and then on the moral grandeur of that great struggle for human rights.

A historian of American literature says: 'Irving had no message.' He was not indeed enslaved by a theory literary or political; neither was he passionate for some reform and convinced that his particular reform was paramount. But he who gave to the world a series of writings which, in addition to being exquisite examples of literary art, are instinct with humor, brotherly kindness, and patriotism, can hardly be said not to have had a message.

Irving rendered an immense service to the biographical study of history. Columbus, Mahomet, the princes and warriors of the Holy War, are made real to us. Nor is this all. His books help to counteract that tendency of the times to make history a recondite science. History cannot be confined to the historians and erudite readers alone. Said Freeman to his Oxford audience one day: 'Has anybody read the essay on Race and

## WASHINGTON IRVING

‘Language in the third series of my Historical Es-  
says? It is very stiff reading, so perhaps nobody  
has.’ And one suspects that Freeman rejoiced a  
little to think it was ‘stiff reading.’

Nevertheless the public insists on its right to  
know the main facts. And as Leslie Stephen says,  
‘the main facts are pretty well ascertained. Darn-  
ley was blown up, whoever supplied the powder,  
and the Spanish Armada certainly came somehow  
to grief.’ That man of letters is a benefactor  
who, like Irving, can give his audience the main  
facts, expressed in terms which make history more  
readable even than romance.

Irving perfected the short story. His genius  
was fecundative. Many a writer of gift and taste,  
and at least one writer of genius, owes Irving a  
debt which can be acknowledged but which can-  
not be paid. Deriving much from his literary pre-  
decessors, and gladly acknowledging the measure  
of his obligation, Irving by the originality of his  
work placed fresh obligations on those who came  
after him.

With his stories of Dutch life he conquered a  
new domain. That these stories remain in their  
first and untarnished beauty is due to Irving’s  
rich humor and ‘golden style,’ and to that inde-  
scribable quality of genius by which it lifts its  
creations out of the local and provincial, and en-  
dows them with a charm which all can understand  
and enjoy.

II

*William Cullen Bryant*



# *William Cullen Bryant*

## I

### HIS LIFE

**T**HE author of 'Thanatopsis' was born at Cummington, a village among the hills of western Massachusetts, on November 3, 1794. Through his father, Doctor Peter Bryant, a physician, he traced his ancestry to Stephen Bryant, an early settler at Duxbury; through his mother, Sarah Snell, he had 'a triple claim' to 'Mayflower' origin.

Doctor Bryant was a many-sided man. He collected books, read poetry (Horace was his favorite), wrote satirical verse, was a musician and something of a mechanic. He was an ardent Federalist, a member of the Massachusetts legislature for sev-

**G. W. Curtis:** *The Life, Character, and Writings of William Cullen Bryant*, Commemorative Address before the New York Historical Society, 1878.

**Parke Godwin:** *A Biography of William Cullen Bryant*, 1883.

**John Bigelow:** *William Cullen Bryant*, 'American Men of Letters,' 1890.

**W. A. Bradley:** *William Cullen Bryant*, 'English Men of Letters,' 1905.

## WILLIAM CULLEN BRYANT

eral terms, and then of the senate. He possessed in high degree the art of imparting knowledge. Medical students thought themselves fortunate in being allowed to study under his direction. Doctor Bryant's father and grandfather were both physicians, and he hoped that his second-born (who was named in honor of the Scottish practitioner, William Cullen) would follow in the ancestral footsteps.

Bryant began to make verses in his eighth year. At ten he wrote an 'address' in heroic couplets, which got into newspaper print. The boy used to pray that he might write verses which would endure. A political satire, *The Embargo or Sketches of the Times*, 'by a youth of thirteen,' if not in the nature of evidence that the prayer had been answered, so delighted Doctor Bryant that he printed it in a pamphlet (1808). A second issue containing additional poems was brought out the next year. To this the author put his name.

Bryant was taught Greek by his uncle, the Reverend Thomas Snell of Brookfield, and mathematics by the Reverend Moses Hallock of Plainfield. He entered the Sophomore class at Williams College in October, 1810, and left the following May. He was to have spent the two succeeding years at Yale, but the plan had to be abandoned for want of money. Some time during the summer of 1811 'Thanatopsis' was written in its first form and laid aside.

## BRYANT'S LIFE

The poet began reading law with Judge Samuel Howe of Worthington, who once reproached his pupil 'for giving to Wordsworth's *Lyrical Ballads* 'time that belonged to Blackstone and Chitty.' He continued his studies under William Baylies of Bridgewater, was admitted to the bar at Plymouth in August, 1815, practised awhile at Plainfield, and then removed to Great Barrington. The lines 'To a Waterfowl' were written the night of the young lawyer's arrival in Plainfield.

He made progress in his profession and was called to argue cases at New Haven and before the supreme court at Boston. The intervals of legal business were given to poetry. Bryant's father urged him to contribute to the new 'North American Review and Miscellaneous Journal,' the editor of which was an old friend. The young lawyer-poet seeming indifferent to the suggestion, Doctor Bryant carried with him to Boston two pieces he had unearthed among his son's papers, namely, 'Thanatopsis' in its first form, and 'A Fragment' now called 'Inscription at the Entrance of a Wood.' Both were printed in the 'Review' for September, 1817. Other poems followed, together with three prose essays (on 'American Poetry,' on 'The Happy Temperament,' and on the use of 'Trisyllabic Feet in Iambic Verse'). He also contributed poems to 'The Idle Man,' Richard Henry Dana's magazine, and the 'United States Literary Gazette.'



## WILLIAM CULLEN BRYANT

In June, 1821, Bryant married Miss Frances Fairchild of Great Barrington. In April of this year he had been invited to give 'the usual poetic 'address' before the Phi Beta Kappa Society at Harvard. 'The Ages' was written for this occasion and publicly read on August 30. At the instance of his Boston friends, Bryant printed 'The 'Ages' with seven other pieces in a little pamphlet entitled *Poems*.

Never in love with the law, the poet began to regard it with aversion. He was intellectually restless and took to play-writing. A farce, 'The Heroes,' in ridicule of duelling, was sent to his friends, the Sedgwicks, in New York, who admitted its merits but doubted its chances of success on the stage. Bryant, at the suggestion of Henry Sedgwick, made two or three visits to the city in search of congenial work. He thought he had found it when he undertook to edit 'The New York Review and Athenæum Magazine,' a periodical made by amalgamating 'The Atlantic Magazine' with the older 'Literary Review.' Bryant wrote to a friend that it was a livelihood, 'and a livelihood is 'all I got from the law.'

The editor of the 'Review' was active in various ways. He studied the Romance languages, gave a course of lectures on poetry before the Athenæum Society (1825), and annual courses on mythology before the National Academy of the Arts of Design (1826-31). He was amused with

New York life ; Great Barrington had not been amusing. He published verse and prose in his own review and helped Sands and Verplanck edit their annual, 'The Talisman.' Somewhat later he edited *Tales of the Glauber Spa* (1832), the joint work of Sands, Leggett, Paulding, Miss Sedgwick, and himself.<sup>1</sup>

The 'Review' suffered from changes in the business management, and Bryant's prospects became gloomy. At this juncture (1826) he was invited to act as assistant to William Coleman, editor of the 'New York Evening Post.' In 1828 he became 'a small proprietor in the establishment,' and when Coleman died (July, 1829) Bryant assumed the post of editor-in-chief and engaged as his assistant William Leggett, a young New Yorker who had shown a marked ability in conducting a weekly journal called 'The Critic.' 'I like politics no better than you do' (Bryant had written to Dana), 'but . . . politics and a belly-full are better than poetry and starvation.'

His theory of the journalist's function is well known. 'He regarded himself as a trustee for the 'public.'<sup>2</sup> Party was much, and Bryant was a strong Democrat, but the people were greater than party.

<sup>1</sup> Bryant's contributions were the stories entitled 'Medfield' and 'The Skeleton's Cave.' As originally planned the book was to have been called *The Sextad*, but Verplanck, who would have made the sixth author, withdrew.

<sup>2</sup> John Bigelow.

Bryant's handling of public questions belongs to political history. His life-long fight against a protective tariff, his defence of Jackson's policy respecting nullification and the United States Bank, his maintenance of the right to discuss slavery as freely as any other subject about which there is a difference of opinion, his insistence that the question of giving the franchise to negroes in the state of New York be settled on its merits and as a local matter with which neither Abolitionist nor slaveholder had anything to do, his determined stand against the annexation of Texas and enlargement of the area of slavery, his position on a multitude of questions which in his life as a public censor he found it necessary to defend or to attack — are fully set forth in the two biographies by his coadjutors.

From 1856 Bryant acted with the Republican party, giving his cordial support to Frémont and to Lincoln. He was a presidential elector in 1861. He advocated the election of Grant in 1868, and again in 1872, the latter time reluctantly 'as the best thing attainable in the circumstances.'

To secure the independence and detachment that would enable him to judge measures fairly, Bryant avoided intercourse with public men, kept away from Washington, took no office, and was otherwise singular. In this way he at least secured a free pen. As to the tone of the comments on men in public life, Bryant approved the theory of

## BRYANT'S LIFE

a brother editor who maintained that nothing should be said which would make it impossible for him who wrote and him who was written about to meet at the same dinner-table the next day. It is not pretended, however, that he was uniformly controlled by this theory. What was the prevailing idea of his journalistic manner may be known from Felton's review of *The Fountain*, in which he marvels that these beautiful poems can be the work of one 'who deals with wrath, and dips his pen 'daily in bitterness and hate. . . .'

Since 1821 no collection of Bryant's verse had been made. Then after ten years he gathered together eighty-nine pieces, including the eight which had appeared in the pamphlet of 1821, and issued them as *Poems*, 1832. Through the friendly offices of Irving the book was reprinted in England with a dedicatory letter to Samuel Rogers. Notwithstanding favorable notices, both English and American, Bryant was despondent. 'Poetic wares,' he said, 'are not for the market of the present day'. . . mankind are occupied with politics, railroads, 'and steamboats.' But he found it necessary to reprint the volume in 1834 (with additional poems), and again in 1836.

His work in prose and verse after 1839 includes *The Fountain and Other Poems*, 1842; *The White-Footed Deer and Other Poems*, 1844; *Poems*, 1847; *Letters of a Traveller*, 1850; *Poems*, 1854; *Letters from Spain*, 1859; *Thirty Poems*, 1864; *Letters*

## WILLIAM CULLEN BRYANT

*from the East*, 1869; *The Iliad of Homer, translated into English blank verse*, 1870; *The Odyssey*, 1871-72; *Orations and Addresses*, 1873; *The Flood of Years*, 1878.

The introduction to the *Library of Poetry and Song* is from Bryant's pen, as is also the preface to E. A. Duyckinck's (still unpublished) edition of Shakespeare. His name appears as one of the authors of *A Popular History of the United States* (1876), together with that of Sydney Howard Gay, on whom fell the burden of the actual writing. It is unfortunate that no adequate reprint of Bryant's political leaders has been made. As much ought to be done for him as Sedgwick did for Leggett.

Bryant found relief from the strain of editorial work in foreign travel. He was abroad with his family in 1834-36, visiting France, Italy, and Germany. He did his sight-seeing deliberately, spending a month in Rome, two months at Florence, three months in Munich, and so on. He had been four months at Heidelberg, when, says one of his biographers (in phrases which he never learned from Bryant), 'His studious sojourn at this renowned seat of learning was interrupted by intelligence of the dangerous illness of his editorial colleague,' and he returned home. During a visit to England in 1845 Bryant met Rogers, Moore, Herschel, Hallam, and Spedding, heard one of his own poems quoted at a Corn Law meeting, where



## BRYANT'S LIFE

among the speakers were Cobden and Bright, and carried a letter of introduction to Wordsworth from Henry Crabb Robinson. He made yet other journeys to Europe and to the East.

Notable among Bryant's public addresses were the orations on Cooper (1852) and Irving (1860) delivered before the New York Historical Society. He was a founder and the third president of the Century Association, first president of the New York Homœopathic Society, president of the American Free Trade League, and member of literary and historical societies innumerable. He held no public office, but as time went on it might almost be said that an office was created for him — that of Representative American. He seemed the incarnation of virtues popularly supposed to have survived from an older and simpler time. He was a great public character. The word venerable acquired a new meaning as one reflected on the career of this eminent citizen who was born when Washington was president, who as a boy had written satires on Jefferson, and who as a man had discussed political questions from the administration of John Quincy Adams to that of Hayes. Other men were as old as he, Bryant seemed to have lived longer.

‘And when at last he fell, he fell as the granite ‘column falls, smitten from without, but sound within.’<sup>1</sup> His death was the result of an accident.

<sup>1</sup> W. C. Bronson.

## WILLIAM CULLEN BRYANT

He gave the address at the unveiling of the statue of Mazzini in Central Park. Though wearied with the exertion and almost overcome by the heat, he was able to walk to the house of a friend. As he was about entering the door he fell backward, striking his head violently against the stone step. He never recovered from the effects of this fall, and died on June 12, 1878.

### II

#### BRYANT'S CHARACTER

WE seldom think of Bryant other than as he appears in the Sarony photograph of 1873. With the snowy beard, the furrowed brow, the sunken but keen eyes, a cloak thrown about the shoulders, he is the ideal poet of popular imagination. Thus must he have looked when he wrote 'The Flood of Years,' and it is difficult to realize that he did not look thus when he wrote 'Thanatopsis.' We do not readily picture Bryant as young or even middle-aged.

Parke Godwin saw him first about 1837. He had a 'wearied, almost saturnine expression of countenance.' He was spare in figure, of medium height, clean shaven, and had an 'unusually large head.' He spoke with decision, but could not be called a copious talker. His voice was noticeably



## BRYANT'S CHARACTER

sweet, his choice of words and accuracy of pronunciation remarkable. When anything was said to awaken mirth, his eyes gleamed with 'a singular radiance and a short, quick, staccato but hearty laugh followed.' He was more sociable when his wife and daughters were present than at other times. Bryant's reserve was always a conspicuous trait.

Under that prim exterior lurked fire and passion. 'In court he often lost his self-control.' It was thought that Bryant might keep a promise he once made of thrashing a legal opponent within an inch of his life ('if he ever says that again') though the man was twice his size. Not long after he became editor-in-chief of the 'Post' Bryant cowhided a journalistic adversary who had bestowed upon him by name, 'the most insulting epithet that can be applied to a human being.'<sup>1</sup> It was the only time his well-schooled temper outwitted him.

His friendships were strong and abiding. He had an inflexible will and a keen sense of justice, so keen that it drove him out of the law. No thought of personal ease or advantage could turn him from a course he had mapped out as right.

<sup>1</sup> Bryant's apology to the public for his course, together with Leggett's statement as an eye-witness, will be found in the 'Evening Post' of Thursday, April 21, 1831. Neither the guarded account of the episode in Godwin's *Bryant*, nor the brief notice in Haswell's *Reminiscences of an Octogenarian* is quite accurate.

## WILLIAM CULLEN BRYANT

He was generous. His benefactions were many and judicious, and the manner of their bestowal as unpretending as possible.

Bryant's 'unassailable dignity' was a marked trait of character. He refused an invitation to a dinner given Charles Dickens by a 'prominent citizen' of New York. 'That man,' said Bryant, 'has known me for years without asking me to his house, and I am not going to be made a stool-pigeon to attract birds of passage that may be flying about.'

He was perfectly simple-minded, incapable of assuming the air of famous poet or successful man of the world. Doubtless he relished praise, but he had an adroit way of putting compliments to one side, tempering the gratitude he really felt with an ironical humor.

### III

#### THE LITERARY CRAFTSMAN

BRYANT was a deliberate and fastidious writer. His literary executors could never have said of him that they found 'neither blot nor erasure among his papers.' His copy, written on the backs of old letters or rejected manuscripts, was a wilderness of interlineations and corrections, and often hard to decipher.

Famous as he was for correctness, it seems a mere

## THE LITERARY CRAFTSMAN

debauch of eulogy to affirm that all of Bryant's contributions to the 'Evening Post' do not contain 'as many erroneous or defective forms of expression' as 'can be found in the first ten numbers of the *Spectator*.' But there is little danger of overestimating his influence on the English of journalism during the forty years and more that he set the example of a high standard of daily writing. He was sparing of advice, though in earlier days he could not always conquer the temptation to amuse himself over the English of his brother editors.<sup>1</sup> It has been denied that he had any part in compiling the famous 'index expurgatorius,' but it is not unreasonable to suppose that this list, embodying traditions of the editorial office, had his approval. Bryant was for directness and precision in writing. Ideas must stand on their merits, if they have them, for such phrasing will define them perfectly.

His prose style may be studied in his books of travel and his addresses. The literary characteristic of *Letters of a Traveller* and its companion volumes is excessive plainness, a homely quality like that of a village pedagogue careful not to make mistakes. One is often reminded of the honest home-

<sup>1</sup> As in an ironical leader commending journalists who refuse to say that a man 'was drowned,' a dangerous innovation, and, 'to preserve the purity of their mother tongue,' stick to time-honored metaphors and say that the man 'found a watery grave.'—'Evening Post,' August 17, 1831.

## WILLIAM CULLEN BRYANT

spun prose of Henry Wansey's *Excursion to the United States*.

Turning to the volume of *Orations and Addresses*, the reader finds himself in another world. Bryant's memorial orations are among the best of their kind, stately, uplifting, and at times even majestic. They belong to a type of composition which lies midway between oratory and literature and unites certain characteristics of each. Written primarily to be heard, and adapted to public utterance, they are also meant to be read. They must stand the test of the ear and then that of the eye. The listener must find his account in them as they come from the lips of the orator, and he who afterward turns at leisure the pages of the printed report must be satisfied. Bryant's speeches are markedly 'literary;' and though oratorical they are wholly free from bombast. Poet though he was, he built no cloud-capped towers of rhetoric.

Coming now to his verse, we find that his poetic flights, though lofty, were neither frequent nor long continued. Apparently he was incapable of writing much or often. This seems true even after allowance is made for his busy and exacting life as a journalist. For years together he composed but a few lines in each year.

His theory fitted his own limitations. Bryant maintained that there is no such thing as a long poem, that what are commonly called long poems are in reality a succession of short poems united

## THE LITERARY CRAFTSMAN

by poetical links. The paradox grows out of the vagueness attaching to the words 'length' and 'poem.' Exactly what a poem is, we shall never know. That is a shadowy line which divides poetry from verse. And there is no term so unmeaning as length. When does a poem begin to be long — is it when the poet has achieved a hundred verses or a thousand, when he has written six cantos or twelve?

To say, as Bryant is reported to have said, that 'a long poem is no more conceivable than a long 'ecstasy,' is to make all poetry dependent on an ecstatic condition. And it reduces all poetic temperaments to the same level. Why may not poetry be an outcome of 'the true enthusiasm that burns 'long'?

Bryant showed skill in handling a variety of metrical forms; it is unsafe to say that he excelled only in blank verse. With declared partisanship for the short poem, he nevertheless did not cultivate the sonnet. Up to the time he was fifty-eight years of age he had written but twelve, and for some of these he apologized, saying, 'they are rather poems 'in fourteen lines than sonnets.'

Comparing the length of his life with the slenderness of his poetical product, we are tempted to bring against this eminent man the charge of wilful unproductiveness. This reluctance, or inertia, or whatever it may be called, has helped to give the impression of a lack of spontaneity. We are



## WILLIAM CULLEN BRYANT

aware of the effort through the very exactness with which the thing has been done. Bryant resembled certain pianists who plead as excuse for not playing, a lack of recent practice. When after repeated urgings one of the reluctant brotherhood 'consents to favor us,' he plays with precision enough but rarely with abandon. The conscious and over-solicitous artist shows in every note.

If much writing has its drawbacks, it also has its value. And the poet who sings frequently cannot offer as a reason for not performing, the excuse that his lyre has not been out of the case for weeks, and that in all probability a string is broken.

### IV

#### THE POET

THE fine stanzas entitled 'The Poet' contain Bryant's theory of his art. The framing of a deathless poem is not the pastime of a drowsy summer's day.

No smooth array of phrase,  
Artfully sought and ordered though it be,  
Which the cold rhymers lays  
Upon his page with languid industry,  
Can wake the listless pulse to livelier speed,  
Or fill with sudden tears the eyes that read.

The secret wouldst thou know  
To touch the heart or fire the blood at will?  
Let thine own eyes o'erflow;  
Let thy lips quiver with the passionate thrill;



## THE POET

Seize the great thought, ere yet its power be past,  
And bind, in words, the fleet emotion fast.

. . . . .

Yet let no empty gust  
Of passion find an utterance in thy lay,  
A blast that whirls the dust  
Along the howling street and dies away;  
But feelings of calm power and mighty sweep,  
Like currents journeying through the windless deep.

This is flat contradiction of the idea that entirely self-conscious and self-controlled art can avail to move the reader. Bryant pleads for deepest feeling in exercise of the poetic function; it is more than important, it is indispensable. Of that striking poem 'The Tides,' he said 'it was written with a certain awe upon me which made me hope that there might be something in it.' The poem proved to be one of Bryant's noblest conceptions. Yet a lady of 'judgment' told one of Bryant's friends, who of course told him, that she did not think there was much in it.

Nature appeals to Bryant in her broad and massive aspects. 'The Prairies' is an illustration. Gazing on the 'encircling vastness' for the first time, the heart swells and the eye dilates in an effort to comprehend it:—

Lo! they stretch,  
In airy undulations, far away,  
As if the ocean, in his gentlest swell,  
Stood still, with all his rounded billows fixed,  
And motionless forever.

As the poet looks abroad over the vast and glowing fields, there sweeps by him a vision of the

WILLIAM CULLEN BRYANT

races that have peopled these solitudes and perished to make room for races to come. It is magnificent even if it is not scientific. In the sense it gives of the spaciousness of the prairies with the myriad sounds of life projected on the great elemental silence, it is a true American poem.

'A Hymn of the Sea' is another illustration of that largeness of view characteristic of Bryant. Each thought is lofty and far-reaching. The cloud that rises from the 'realm of rain' shadows whole countries, the tornado wrecks a fleet, whirling the vast hulks 'like chaff upon the waves:' —

These restless surges eat away the shores  
Of earth's old continents; the fertile plain  
Welters in shallows, headlands crumble down,  
And the tide drifts the sea-sand in the streets  
Of the drowned city.

He conveys the idea not only of spaciousness but of endless duration in the lines describing the coral worm laying his 'mighty reefs,' toiling from 'age to age' until

His bulwarks overtop the brine, and check  
The long wave rolling from the southern pole  
To break upon Japan.

Certain lines in 'A Forest Hymn' are also remarkable for the sense they give of vast reaches of time, stretching not forward but backward into eternity: —

These lofty trees  
Wave not less proudly that their ancestors  
Moulder beneath them. Oh, there is not lost

## THE POET

One of earth's charms : upon her bosom yet,  
After the flight of untold centuries,  
The freshness of her far beginning lies  
And yet shall lie.

The 'Song of the Stars,' though not one of Bryant's happiest poems, — the hypercritical reader feeling that the 'orbs of beauty' and 'spheres of flame' might have made a more appropriate metrical choice for their song, — shows none the less the poet's strength in dealing with nature in the large. The lines 'To a Waterfowl' are magical in part by virtue of the impression they make of immense distance. With the poet's penetrating vision we can see the solitary way through the rosy depths, the pathless coast, and the one bit of life in

The desert and illimitable air.

Bryant's mind readily lifts itself from the minute to the massive, as in the poem 'Summer Wind,' a fine example of the crescendo effects he knew so well how to produce. In a few lines he gives the sensation of heat, closeness, exhaustion, and pictures the plants drooping in a stillness broken only by the 'faint and interrupted murmur of the bee.' His thought then sweeps upward to the wooded hills towering in scorching heat and dazzling light, and then still higher to the bright clouds,

Motionless pillars of the brazen heaven —  
Their bases on the mountains — their white tops  
Shining in the far ether . . .

WILLIAM CULLEN BRYANT

The poet never wearies of this majestic pagantry of the natural world. In 'The Firmament,' in 'The Hurricane' (imitated from Heredia), in 'Monument Mountain,' his chief thought is to translate the reader to his own lofty vantage-ground.

But Nature is not merely a spectacle, it has a power to heal and invigorate. Life loses its pettiness when one leaves the city and seeks the forest. The holy men who hid themselves 'deep in 'the woody wilderness' perhaps did not well —

But let me often to these solitudes  
Retire, and in thy presence reassure  
My feeble virtue. Here its enemies,  
The passions, at thy plainer footsteps shrink  
And tremble and are still.

The poet finds inspiration not alone in the terror of the storm, the majesty of the forest, the gray waste of ocean, the mystery of the night of stars, but in the humbler things, the rivulet by which he played as a child, the violet growing on its bank, the hum of bees, the notes of hang-bird and wren, the gossip of swallows, and the gay chirp of the ground squirrel. 'The Yellow Violet' and the lines 'To the Fringed Gentian' spring from this love of the unobtrusive charms of Nature. Less familiar than these, but a faultless example of Bryant's art, is 'The Painted Cup : ' —

. . . tell me not  
That these bright chalices were tinted thus  
To hold the dew for fairies, when they meet  
On moonlight evenings in the hazel bowers,  
And dance till they are thirsty.

## THE POET

The poet will not call up 'faded fancies of an 'elder world.' If the fresh savannahs must be peopled with creatures of imagination, it may be done without borrowing European elves :—

Let then the gentle Manitou of flowers,  
Lingering among the bloomy waste he loves,  
Though all his swarthy worshippers are gone —  
Slender and small, his rounded cheek all brown  
And ruddy with the sunshine ; let him come  
On summer mornings, when the blossoms wake,  
And part with little hands the spiky grass,  
And touching, with his cherry lips, the edge  
Of these bright beakers, drain the gathered dew.

Bryant wrote poems of freedom. The earlier of these, 'The Song of the Greek Amazon,' the 'Massacre at Scio,' the 'Greek Partisan,' and 'Italy,' voice his sympathy with the oppressed nations of the Old World, the 'struggling multitude 'of states,' that 'writhe in shackles.'

Among his later poems on the same theme, 'Earth,' 'The Winds,' 'The Antiquity of Freedom,' and 'The Battle Field' are representative. The first three with their many stately lines show how spontaneously his thought, even when nature is not the subject, grows out of the contemplation of nature and then returns to such contemplation as to a resting place. 'The Battle Field,' the expression of a noble faith in the outcome of 'a friendless warfare,' contains the most inspiring of his quatrains, as it is one of the best contributions made by an American poet to the stock of quotable English verse :—

## WILLIAM CULLEN BRYANT

Truth, crushed to earth, shall rise again;  
The eternal years of God are hers;  
But Error, wounded, writhes with pain,  
And dies among his worshippers.

His patriotic poems are few in number, but Bryant's reticence must be taken into account. Coming from him, the verses mean more than if they came from another. Two of the best are 'Oh Mother of a mighty Race' and 'Not Yet.' The second of these, written in July, 1861, has a finely imaginative stanza in which are pictured the dead monarchies of the past eager to welcome another broken and ruined land among their number:—

Not yet the hour is nigh when they  
Who deep in Eld's dim twilight sit,  
Earth's ancient kings, shall rise and say,  
"Proud country, welcome to the pit!  
So soon art thou like us brought low!"  
No, sullen group of shadows, No!

To the same year belong the spirited verses  
'Our Country's Call: '—

Strike to defend the gentlest sway  
That Time in all his course has seen.

. . . . .  
Few, few were they whose swords of old  
Won the fair land in which we dwell;  
But we are many, we who hold  
The grim resolve to guard it well.  
Strike, for that broad and goodly land,  
Blow after blow, till men shall see  
That Might and Right move hand in hand,  
And glorious must their triumph be!

Such was the temper of men who had looked  
with philosophic composure and curiosity on the



## THE POET

movements of the sometimes well-nigh frenzied abolitionists. The blow at the integrity of the nation fired their cool patriotism to white heat.

What lightness of touch Bryant had is shown in that exquisite lyric 'The Stream of Life.' He could be conventional, as in the love poem where he celebrates 'the gentle season' when 'nymphs 'relent,' and very sensibly advises the young lady 'ere her bloom is past, to secure her lover.' He was not strong in wit or humor. The verses 'To 'a Mosquito' might have been read with good effect to a party of well-fed clubmen after dinner, but finding them in the same volume with 'A 'Forest Hymn' gives one an uncomfortable surprise, like finding a pun in Lowell's *Cathedral*. That Bryant could write agreeable narrative verse, 'The Children of the Snow' and 'Sella' bear witness. That he is at his best in meditative poems, lofty characterizations of Nature, grand visions of Life and Death, is proved by hundreds of felicitous verses which have become an inalienable part of our young literature.

He never really excelled the work of his youth. Bryant will always be known as the author of 'Thanatopsis.' This great vision of Death is his stateliest poem and his best, the most felicitous of phrase and the loftiest in imagery. Written by a stoic, magnificently stoical in tone, it offers but a stoic's comfort after all. Perhaps this is a secret of its popularity, on the theory that while pro-

## WILLIAM CULLEN BRYANT

fessed pagans are few the instinct towards paganism still exists, and most among those who say least about it.

### V

#### LATEST POETICAL WORK

##### *THE ILIAD AND THE ODYSSEY*

THE collected edition of Bryant's poems of 1854 contains a handful of translations, twelve from the Spanish, four from the German, one each from the French, the Provençal, the Portuguese, and the Greek. In 1864 a translation of the fifth book of the *Odyssey* was printed in the volume entitled *Thirty Poems*. The praise which it called out gave Bryant the impulse to further experiments of the same sort; and after the death of his wife (in 1866), when the necessity was upon him of forgetting his grief so far as possible in some engrossing work, he undertook a version of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* entire.

He gave himself methodically to the task, translating about forty lines a day. Later he increased the daily stint to seventy-five lines. He chose blank verse because 'the use of rhyme in a translation is a constant temptation to petty infidelities.'

Bryant retained the misleading Latin forms of proper names. Worsley says: 'Not even Mr.

## LATEST POETICAL WORK

‘Gladstone’s example can now make Juno, Mercury, and Venus admissible in Homeric story.’ But Worsley confessed his own inability to write Phoibos, Apollôn, and Kirké. Bryant’s argument for his course looks specious: ‘I was translating from Greek into English, and I therefore translated the names of the gods, as well as the other parts of the poem.’ Probably he had an affection for the old nomenclature, a sentiment like Macaulay’s, who ‘never could reconcile himself to seeing the friends of his boyhood figure as Kleon, and Alkibiadês, and Poseidôn, and Odysseus.’<sup>1</sup>

An enthusiastic admirer of Bryant declares that in the opinion of ‘competent critics’ his versions of Homer ‘will hold their own with the translations of Pope, Chapman, Newman, or the late Earl Derby.’ Much depends on the question of what a ‘competent critic’ is, and which one of several competent critics is to be taken as final authority. Competent critics, who, by the way, seldom agree, have a habit of agreeing on anything sooner than the merits of a version of Homer. And when one remembers the fearful attack made by Matthew Arnold on Newman (‘Any vivacities of expression which may have given him pain I sincerely regret’)—he may well hesitate to take as a compliment the statement that Bryant will ‘hold his own’ with Newman.

<sup>1</sup> G. O. Trevelyan.

## WILLIAM CULLEN BRYANT

The question of the higher merit of the poem rests with the experts at last. Pessimists all, they are discouragingly hostile to metrical versions of the *Iliad*. Yet the most uncompromising of them would hardly deny a lay reader the privilege of enjoying Homer, in so far as possible, through the medium of Bryant's blank verse. They might even be persuaded to admit that this version has a peculiar adaptability to the needs of the public; that the clarity and beauty of the English, the dignified ease of the measure, the sustained energy and vigor of the performance as a whole, fit Bryant's Homer in a high degree to the use for which it was intended. The argument from popularity, that always unsafe and often vicious argument, has a measure of force here. Granting that Homer in any honest translation is better than no Homer at all, may not the uncompromising scholars be called on to rejoice that this more than honest, nay, this admirable translation of the *Iliad* has sold to the extent of many thousands of copies? Where there are so many buyers, there must be readers not a few.

Bryant was one of those unusual men who have two distinct callings. Much surprise has been expressed at his apparent ability to carry on his functions of journalist and poet without clash. But is it true, or more than superficially true, that he did so carry them on? To be sure, he wrote his editorial articles at the newspaper office and his verses

## CONCLUSION

elsewhere, but this is a mere mechanical distinction. A man of Bryant's depth of conviction and passionate temperament does not throw off care when he boards a suburban train for his country home.

The history of Bryant's inner life has not been written, perhaps cannot be. This is not to imply that his character was enigmatic and mysterious, but merely to emphasize the fact of his extraordinary reserve. More than most self-contained men he kept his own counsel. Such a history would show how deep his experience of the world had ploughed into him, and it might explain in a degree the remote and stoical character of his verse.

Bryant's poetical work as a whole has an impassive quality often described as coldness. Partly due to his genius and accentuated by the excessive retouching to which he subjected his verse, it grew in still larger measure out of his determination not to impart to his verse any of the feverishness of spirit consequent upon a life of political warfare. The poet held himself wonderfully in check, as a man of iron will allows no mark of the strong passion under which he labors to show in his face. Bryant was rarely betrayed into so much of personal feeling as flashed out in that bitter stanza of 'The Future Life : ' —

For me the sordid cares in which I dwell,  
Shrink and consume my heart, as heat the scroll ;  
And wrath has left its scar — that fire of hell  
Has left its scar upon my soul.

## *WILLIAM CULLEN BRYANT*

While the detachment was not complete, Bryant undoubtedly kept his poetic apart from his secular life in a way to command admiration. This he accomplished by extraordinary self-restraint. As a part of the varied and long-continued discipline to which he subjected himself, the self-restraint made for character. The question, however, arises whether the poetry did not, in certain ways, suffer under the very discipline by which the character developed.



III

*James Fenimore Cooper*



# James Fenimore Cooper

## I

### HIS LIFE

**J**AMES COOPER was the eleventh of the twelve children of William and Elizabeth (Fenimore) Cooper, of Burlington, New Jersey. He was born in that picturesque town by the Delaware on September 15, 1789. The name James, given him in honor of his grandfather, had also been borne by his first American ancestor, who is said to have come from Stratford-on-Avon, in 1679. In fulfilment of a promise to his mother (whose family had become extinct in the male line), the novelist, in 1826, changed his name to Fenimore-Cooper.

At the close of the Revolutionary War, William Cooper acquired large tracts of land on Otsego Lake in New York, settled there in 1790, founded the village still known as Cooperstown, and built

**W. C. Bryant:** *A Discourse on the Life, Character, and Genius of James Fenimore Cooper*, 1852.

**T. R. Lounsbury:** *James Fenimore Cooper*, 'American Men of Letters,' fourth edition, 1884.

**W. B. Shubrick Clymer:** *James Fenimore Cooper*, 'Beacon Biographies,' 1900.

## JAMES FENIMORE COOPER

for himself a stately home to which he gave the name of Otsego Hall. He was the first judge of the county and a member of Congress, a man of strong character and agreeable address.<sup>1</sup>

Cooper's boyhood was passed amid picturesque natural surroundings, on the edge of civilization, the scene of *The Deerslayer* and *The Pioneers*. He attended the village school, prepared for college with the rector of St. Peter's Church, Albany, entered Yale in the second term of the Freshman year (Class of 1806), and was dismissed in the Junior year for some boyish escapade the nature of which is unexplained.

It was decided that he should enter the navy. There was then no training school, and boys took the first lessons in seamanship in the merchant marine. Cooper spent a year before the mast in the 'Sterling,' sailing from New York to London, thence to Gibraltar, back to London, and from London to Philadelphia. His experiences are set forth in the early chapters of *Ned Myers*. The 'Sterling' lost two of her best hands by impressment as soon as she reached English waters. Cooper's indignation at these outrages afterwards found voice through the lips of Ithuel Bolt in the story entitled *Wing-and-Wing*.

<sup>1</sup> Judge Cooper's *A Guide in the Wilderness*, Dublin, 1810, was reprinted in 1897 with an introduction by J. F. Cooper [the Younger], throwing much light on the manners of the times and the character of his ancestor.

## COOPER'S LIFE

He was commissioned midshipman on January 1, 1808, and served awhile on the 'Vesuvius.' In the following winter he was one of the party sent to Oswego to build a brig for the defence of the lake, and became acquainted with the regions described in *The Pathfinder*. In the summer of 1809 he had charge of the gun-boats on Lake Champlain, and in the autumn was ordered to the sloop of war 'Wasp.'

He left the service on his betrothal with Miss Susan DeLancey of Mamaroneck, New York, whom he married on January 1, 1811. For a few years he lived the life of a landed proprietor, dividing his time between Cooperstown, Scarsdale, and Mamaroneck. The dulness of a novel he was reading aloud to his wife provoked him to say that he could write a better one himself. Challenged to prove it, he produced *Precaution* (1820), a story of English life, following conventional lines. It was apprentice work. The effort of composition taught Cooper that he could write, but not that he could write well. He had no conceit of the book, and refused it a place in his collected writings.

In 1821 *The Spy, a Tale of the Neutral Ground*, was published; its unqualified good fortune made Cooper a professed man of letters. From that time on until his death, twenty-nine years later, he produced books with uninterrupted regularity.

*The Spy* was followed by *The Pioneers, or the Sources of the Susquehanna*, 1823; *The Pilot, a Tale*

## JAMES FENIMORE COOPER

*of the Sea*, 1824; *Lionel Lincoln, or the Leaguer of Boston*, 1825; *The Last of the Mohicans, a Narrative of 1757*, 1826. But one of this group of four can be pronounced a failure and two have had a success almost phenomenal in the history of letters.

Cooper shared the American passion for seeing foreign lands. The proceeds of authorship enabled him to carry out a plan he had formed of spending some time abroad. With his family and servants (a party of ten in all), he set sail from New York on June 1, 1826. He proposed to be gone five years. He overstayed that time by two years and five months. From May, 1826, to about January, 1829, he held the 'nominal position' of American consul at Lyons. His journeyings were made in a leisurely way after the fashion of the time. Eighteen months were spent in Paris and the vicinity, four months in London, and a few weeks in Holland, Belgium, and Switzerland. The winter of 1828-29 was passed in Florence, and was followed by a voyage to Naples. After spending some months at Sorrento and Naples, he settled in Rome for the winter of 1829-30. Thence to Venice, Munich, Dresden, and finally back to Paris.

He published while abroad *The Prairie*, 1827; *The Red Rover*, 1828; *Notions of the Americans, Picked up by a Travelling Bachelor*, 1828; *The Wept of Wish-ton-Wish*, 1829; *The Water-Witch*,



## COOPER'S LIFE

*or the Skimmer of the Seas*, 1830; *The Bravo*, 1831; *The Heidenmauer, or the Benedictines*, 1832; *The Headsman, or the Abbaye des Vignerons*, 1833.

In November, 1833, Cooper returned to America. That and several ensuing winters were passed in New York, the summers in Cooperstown. Later he made Otsego Hall his permanent home.

He soon became embroiled in quarrels with the press. While in Paris his defence of Lafayette's position in what is known as the 'Expenses Controversy' had provoked from his native land criticism which Cooper resented. He angered a part of the inhabitants of Cooperstown by making clear to them that Three Mile Point (a wooded tract on the lake, long used by the villagers as a picnic ground) was not theirs, as they maintained, but a part of the Cooper estate. With no thought of robbing them of their pleasure park, he insisted on their understanding that they enjoyed its use by favor and not by right.

For this the country papers assailed him. Combative by nature, Cooper brought suits for libel and recovered damages. The novel spectacle of an author baiting the newspapers 'caused remark.' The city press joined in the attack, the 'Courier and Enquirer,' the 'New York Tribune,' the 'Albany Evening Journal,' edited by Thurlow Weed, who once said apropos of his skill in stirring up litigation: 'There is something in my manner of writing that makes the galled jades

## JAMES FENIMORE COOPER

‘wince.’ Verdicts were given in Cooper’s favor. More libels followed, more suits were brought, more damages recovered. A cry arose that the liberty of the press was endangered. Cooper did not think so. He was a bulldog; when he had once fastened his teeth in a Whig editor, nothing could make him let go. He continued his prosecutions until he made his detractors respect him. It took about six years to do it. Bryant has described with grim humor the novelist’s warfare with that leviathan the Press: ‘He put a hook ‘into the nose of this huge monster,’ said Bryant admiringly.’

This warfare disturbed Cooper’s peace of mind; but in no wise interrupted his literary activity. The following list records by no means all that he wrote after 1834, but will suffice to show his right copious and often happy industry. Besides ten volumes of travels, Cooper published: *A Letter to his Countrymen*, 1834; *The Monikins*, 1835; *The American Democrat*, 1838; *Homeward Bound, or the Chase*, 1838; *Home as Found*, 1838; *The History of the Navy of the United States of America*,

<sup>1</sup> One of the most extraordinary of the suits arose from criticism of the *Naval History*. Cooper had refused to take the popular side of a heated controversy and to join in assailing Elliott, Perry’s second in command at the Battle of Lake Erie. The suit, against Stone of the ‘Commercial Advertiser,’ was settled by arbitration, and in Cooper’s favor. Lounsbury’s *Cooper*, pp. 200–230.

## COOPER'S LIFE

1839; *The Pathfinder, or the Inland Sea*, 1840; *Mercedes of Castile, or the Voyage to Cathay*, 1840; *The Deerslayer, or the First War Path*, 1841; *The Two Admirals*, 1842; *The Wing-and-Wing, or Le Feu-Follet*, 1842; *Wyandotté, or the Huttet Knoll*, 1843; *Ned Meyers, or a Life before the Mast*, 1843; *Afloat and Ashore, or the Adventures of Miles Wallingford*, 1844; *Miles Wallingford* (the second part of *Afloat and Ashore*), 1844; *Satanstoe, or the Littlepage Manuscripts*, 1845; *The Chainbearer, or the Littlepage Manuscripts*, 1846; *Lives of Distinguished American Naval Officers*, 1846; *The Redskins, or Indian and Injin*, 1846; *The Crater, or Vulcan's Peak*, 1847; *Jack Tier, or the Florida Reefs*, 1848; *The Oak Openings, or the Bee Hunter*, 1848; *The Sea Lions, or the Lost Sealers*, 1849; *The Ways of the Hour*, 1850.

*The Spy* was dramatized and played successfully.<sup>1</sup> Dramatizations were also made of *The Pilot*, *The Red Rover*, *The Water-Witch*, *The Pioneers* ('The Wigwam, or Templeton Manor'), and *The Wept of Wish-ton-Wish* ('Miantonomah and Narrahmat-tah'). An original comedy, 'Upside Down, or Philosophy in Petticoats,'<sup>2</sup> was withdrawn after four performances. No satisfactory account exists of Cooper's earnings by literature. It is believed that in the later years he was obliged to write, if

<sup>1</sup> Park Theatre, New York, March, 1822.

<sup>2</sup> Burton's Theatre, New York, June, 1850.

## JAMES FENIMORE COOPER

not for the necessities of life, at least for the comforts and luxuries.

The hostility provoked by his energetic criticisms subsided in time. There was even a project on foot in New York to pay him the compliment of a public dinner as a proof of returning confidence. His untimely illness put to one side the question of honors of this poor sort.

Cooper died at Otsego Hall on September 14, 1851.

## II

### HIS CHARACTER

COOPER was a democrat in theory but not in practice. The rude 'feudalism' in which his boyhood was passed fostered the aristocratic sentiment. A residence abroad, in the obsequious atmosphere with which the serving classes invest any one who has the appearance of wealth, aggravated it. No one could have been more heartily 'American' than Cooper; but he made distinctions and his countrymen abhorred the distinctions.

Pride of this not unreasonable sort may go hand in hand with genuine modesty. Cooper was more unpretentious than his enemies were willing to allow. With a reputation that would have opened many doors he made no capital of it; he had no mind 'to thrust himself on all societies.'

## *HIS CHARACTER*

He was never slow to make use of the inalienable American privilege of speaking one's mind. In 1835 the theory of the entire perfection of the American character was seldom challenged, at least by a native writer. That Cooper should entertain doubts on the subject was thought monstrous. It was resented in him the more because of his manner. Opinions quite as radical might have been uttered wittily and the end accomplished. Cooper had little wit. His touch was heavy and he was in dead earnest. He lacked neither courage, nor honesty, nor highmindedness, nor generosity, nor yet judgment (if his temper was unruffled), but he was entirely wanting in tact, and largely wanting in geniality of the useful, if superficial, sort, which lessens the wear and tear of human intercourse.

A philosopher divides famous men into two classes: those who are admired in their own homes (as well as in the world), and those who are admired anywhere but at home. Cooper belonged to the first class rather than the second. This proud, irascible, contentious, dogmatic man of letters enjoyed the unswerving loyalty and deep affection of every member of his family. And from this his biographer argues an essential sweetness of nature.

Cooper somewhere says: 'Men are as much indebted to a fortuitous concurrence of circumstances for the characters they sustain in this world,



## JAMES FENIMORE COOPER

‘as to their personal qualities.’ It was his ill-luck to have the accidents of his character often mistaken for the character itself.

### III

#### THE WRITER

COOPER’S English at best, though fluent and spirited, is without grace; at worst it is clumsy and intractable. This writer of world-wide fame is singularly wanting in literary finish. He is not careless but colorless, not slovenly but neutral. He succeeds almost without the aid of what is commonly called ‘style.’ He is read for what he has to say, not for the way in which he says it. There are surprises in store for the reader, but they are not to be found in the perfect word, the happy phrase, or the balance of a sentence, but always in the unexpected turn of an adventure, in a well-planned episode abounding in incident, in the release of mental tension following the happy issue out of danger. As was said of another copious writer, ‘he weaves a loose web;’ one might add that it is often of coarse fibre. In few writers of eminence is form so subservient to contents. The defect was due to haste, to the natural and lordly contempt of a spontaneous story-teller for the niceties of rhetoric.



## THE SPY

### IV

#### ROMANCES OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

##### THE SPY, LIONEL LINCOLN

LIFE in that unhappy strip of country known during the Revolution as 'the neutral ground,' Westchester County, New York, is the subject of *The Spy*. Here frequent and bloody encounters took place between skirmishers from the opposing armies. Marauding bands, ostensibly 'loyal' or 'patriotic,' though often composed of banditti, made life a misery and a terror to peaceably inclined householders. Cooper wrote from first-hand traditions. The family of his wife had been loyalists, and the most famous of Westchester County raiders was a DeLancey.

The chief character is Harvey Birch, the Spy. Professing to be in the employ of the British, he is the most trusted of Washington's secret agents. His devotion to his chief is a passion, almost a religion. Mean of appearance, niggardly in his mode of life, he is capable of the last degree of personal sacrifice. His patriotism is of the most exalted kind, since it can have no proportionate reward. He must live (perchance die) detested by the people for whom he risks his life daily. Cooper makes us deeply

## JAMES FENIMORE COOPER

interested in this uncouth being, who, persecuted to the point of despair, and even brought to the gallows, finds always a way of escape. Birch gambled with his life in stake. It was a desperate throw when he destroyed the bit of paper signed by Washington.

The romantic hero of the story is Peyton Dunwoodie, a youth whose 'dark and sparkling glance' played havoc with the hearts of impressionable ladies. But Peyton was true, and loved but one. More to the modern taste are the humors of Lawton and Sitgreaves, of Sergeant Hollister and Betty Flanagan. 'Mr. Harper' is impressive, and the mystery of his character well sustained. The ladies of 'The Locusts' have the quaint charm inseparable from other-day manners and costume. To be sure one of them, who seems likely to die of love, is mercifully killed by a random bullet, and another becomes a maniac. Novel-readers wanted a deal for their money in 1821. But Frances Wharton is a likable little creature, though her talk does not in the least resemble that of Miss Clara Middleton.

As an Irish bishop said of *Gulliver's Travels*, the book contains improbabilities. The device of a masque which converts young Henry Wharton into the counterfeit presentment of an old gray-headed negro is far-fetched. *The Spy* was not intended to be a realistic novel.

Cooper projected another story on the back-

## THE PIONEERS

ground of the Revolution. *Lionel Lincoln*, for all the work put on it, was not a success. It had merits among which the merit of spontaneity is not conspicuous. Had the failure been less apparent, the novelist might have been tempted to continue the 'Legends of the Thirteen Republics.'

### V

## THE LEATHER-STOCKING TALES AND OTHER INDIAN STORIES

A FRENCH critic once remarked that nothing was so like a *chanson de geste* as another *chanson de geste*. Readers have deplored the fact that nothing was so like a Leather-Stocking tale as another Leather-Stocking tale. But *The Pioneers*, the first of the series in order of composition, bears little resemblance to the others, and as a picture of life in a New York village at the end of the Eighteenth Century has a historical value. The narrative is firm in texture. The characters are thirty in number, and every man in his humor. The Judge, Cousin Richard, Mr. Grant the clergyman, all the town oddities, Monsieur Le Quoi, Major Hartmann, Doolittle, Kirby, and Benjamin are real and humanly interesting. The dialogue is fresh, racy, and appropriate. There is no effort at compression; winter evenings were long in 1824.

## JAMES FENIMORE COOPER

The book holds one by the scenes and characters rather than by the 'fable.' The mystery of 'Edwards,' and the coming to life of old Major Effingham, are well enough; but the strength of the story is in the episodes, such as that where Hiram Doolittle, supported by Jotham and Kirby, tries to serve the warrant on Natty Bumppo, in the trial of the old hunter, or the capital scene where Natty is put into the stocks, and the chivalrous major-domo, Benjamin, insists on sharing his punishment, and cheering the heart-broken old man with comfortable and picturesque words. Presently Doolittle came to enjoy the fruit of his victory. Venturing too near, he found himself in the tenacious grasp of the irate major-domo. Benjamin's legs were stationary, but his fists were free, and he proceeded to work away with 'great 'industry' on Mr. Doolittle's face, 'using one 'hand to raise up his antagonist, while he knocked 'him over with the other;' he scorned to strike a fallen adversary.

*The Pioneers* would merit a high place in American fiction were it only on account of that original character, Natty Bumppo, or 'Leather-Stocking.' He is natural, easy, attractive. In the other books (always excepting *The Prairie*), there is more of invention. Putting it in another way, the first Natty Bumppo is like a study from life, while the others often leave the impression of being studies from the first study.

## LAST OF THE MOHICANS

By changing the background, the costume, the accessories, and making his hero younger or older, Cooper found him available for more exciting dramas than that played in Templeton.

Leather-Stocking next appears as 'Hawkeye,' the scout, in *The Last of the Mohicans*, a narrative based on the massacre of Fort William Henry in 1757, and, all things considered, the most famous of Cooper's novels. It is an out-and-out Indian story, good for boys and not bad for men, being vigorous, brilliant, and packed with adventure. The capture, by a band of Montcalm's marauding Iroquois, of the two daughters of the old Scottish general, their rescue by Hawkeye, Chingachgook, and Uncas, their recapture, the pursuit and the thrilling events in the Indian villages, form the staple of a book which without exaggeration may be called world-renowned.

If *The Last of the Mohicans* suffers from one fault more than another, it is from a superabundance of hair-breadth escapes. The novelist heaps difficulties on difficulties, all of which appear insurmountable, and are presently surmounted with an ease that makes the reader half angry with himself for having worried.

As might have been expected, in growing younger Natty has grown theatrical; he appears too exactly at the critical moment to perform the deed of cool bravery expected of him. It could hardly be otherwise; *The Last of the Mohicans* is



## JAMES FENIMORE COOPER

a romance, and in romances such things must be. Chingachgook, that engaging savage, has for so many years met the romantic ideal of the American Indian that it is unlikely he will ever be disturbed in his place in the reader's esteem. His rôle of white man's friend was played in *The Prairie* by Hard-Heart, the young Pawnee chief.

*The Prairie* has an originality all its own. This strange and sombre tale brings together an oddly assorted group of people, some of whom — the squatter and his family in particular — are drawn with rude strength. There are weak points in the plot. The carefully guarded tent with its hidden occupant is a poor device for compelling attention. Dr. Battius, endlessly talkative about genus and species, is a tiresome personage. The justification of the story as a work of art is to be sought in the descriptions of the 'desert,' in the impressions given of immeasurable distance and illimitable space, the abode of mystery and terror. The passages describing the stampede of a herd of buffalo, the night surprise of the trapper and his friends by the Sioux, the escape of Hard-Heart from the torture-stake, are all done with a masterly stroke.

Natty Bumppo figures in *The Prairie* as an old man of eighty-seven. His eye has lost its keenness of vision and his hand its steadiness. But the heart is undaunted ('Lord, what a strange 'thing is fear!') and the mind fertile in expedients. At times the trapper appears in almost superhu-



## THE PATHFINDER

man proportions ; he is mythical, like a hero of antiquity. The attachment between the ancient hunter and his dog is exquisitely described. In the beautiful account of Leather-Stocking's last hour no touch is more poetic than that where the dying man discovers that the faithful Hector is dead. He will not say that a Christian can hope to meet his hound again ; but he asks that Hector be buried beside him ; no harm, he thinks, can come of that.

Thirteen years after the publication of *The Prairie* appeared *The Pathfinder*, and one year after that *The Deerslayer*. The series was now complete, forming 'something like a drama in five acts.' *The Pathfinder* shows Natty in mature manhood, and (for the comfort of all who require this test of their heroes of fiction) a victim of unrequited love. Exposed to the wiles of the most treacherous of all Mingos, Cupid, the quondam hunter, hunted in turn, takes defeat like the man he is. In *The Deerslayer* the chronicle is completed with a group of scenes from Natty's youth. On the shores of Otsego Lake, while defending old Hutter's aquatic home, the young man learns the first lessons in the art of war.

Cooper wrote yet other Indian stories. Two may be taken note of in this section : *The Wept of Wish-ton-Wish*, a narrative of the Connecticut settlements in 'King Philip's' time, and *Wyandotté*, an episode of frontier life in 1775. The

## JAMES FENIMORE COOPER

latter is realistic. Cooper was on his own ground and knew the Willoughby Patent and the Hutted Knoll much as he knew 'Templeton' and Otsego Lake. *The Wept of Wish-ton-Wish* is pure romance. In spite of the labored speech of the Puritan settlers and the metaphorical flights of Metacom and Conanchet, the story is enthralling. That is a genuinely pathetic scene where Ruth Heathcote seeks to awaken in the mind of Narramattah, her lost daughter, now the wife of the Narragansett chief, some faint memory of her childhood, and the account of Conanchet's death at the hands of the Mohicans is a strong and dramatic piece of writing.

### VI

#### THE SEA STORIES

##### FROM *THE PILOT* TO *MILES WALLINGFORD*

*The Pilot* is an imaginary episode in the life of John Paul Jones. Cooper has given his hero a poetic character. 'Mr. Gray' applies science to the problem before him up to the critical moment, and then trusts to intuition, to his genius, and finds wind and wave owning him their master. The new note is in the vivid descriptive passages, couched in terms of practical seamanship, but so graphically put that the most ignorant of lubbers

## THE PILOT

can be depended on to read with a quickened pulse. Notable among these are the rescue of the frigate from the shoals, and the fight between the 'Alacrity' and 'Ariel.'

There is much human nature in the speech of the men if not of the women. The dialogue between Borroughcliffe and Manual would not shame books more celebrated for humor than *The Pilot*. Vast refreshment can be found in the racy and picturesque talk of Long Tom Coffin, the most original character in Cooper's gallery of seamen; also in that of Boltrope, who from an early 'prejudice' against knee-breeches (he somehow always imagined Satan as wearing them) never became fully reconciled to the ship's chaplain until that worthy left off 'scudding under bare poles' and garbed himself like other men. Dillon, the lawyer, is too obviously the scoundrel. As the 'Cacique of Pedee,' however, he serves a good end. His kinsman, Colonel Howard, walks the stage with dignity, a worthy specimen of the loyalist of the American Revolution, and typical of the class for whom Cooper had much sympathy.

The young women are far from being lay figures. They have beauty, intelligence, courage, even audacity. That they are too perfect in feature, form, manner, was a defect common to all fiction of the time; the art of making a heroine of a plain woman was in its infancy. Cooper, who could describe a girl, had always a deal of trouble to make

## JAMES FENIMORE COOPER

her talk. Did he never listen to the conversation of those interesting creatures known, in the parlance of his day, as 'females'? Would Alice Dunscombe, meeting her lover after a separation of six years, have used the phrases Cooper put into her lips? All these young women might with justice have complained that the speaking parts assigned them were not representative. But they were at the author's mercy and did as they were told.

Cooper's principal biographer, to whom we are all vastly indebted, says that 'the female characters of his earlier novels are never able to do 'anything successfully but faint.' This is unfair. Katherine Plowden, a brunette beauty, whom Professor Lounsbury has allowed himself to forget, goes habited *en garçon* to seek her lover, and does not faint when she finds him, only laughs like the gay Rosalind she is.

The story of 'Mr. Gray the pilot' is good, but *The Red Rover* is better. Cooper gave the public something new in pirates. The old-fashioned corsair, in theatrical phrase, looked his part. He swore horribly, was awful to behold, black-whiskered, visibly blood-stained, a walking stand of arms, like the monsters described in Esquemeling's *Buccaneers of America*. Unlike L'Olonnois, of evil memory, the captain of the 'Dolphin' is almost a Brummell; his cabin is a boudoir, and he has the wit to eschew the old-fashioned device of skull

## THE RED ROVER

and cross-bones. One is inclined, however, to laugh when the pirate 'throws his form on a divan' and bids music discourse. The Rover was somewhat given to posing, and in moments of deep thought wore a 'look of faded marble.'

There is nothing fantastic in Wilder, the young captain, and nothing to be desired in his handling of the 'Royal Caroline.' The description of the flight before the strange cruiser is a splendidly nervous piece of writing. From the moment when the Bristol trader disentangles herself from the slaver's side in the harbor of Newport until she becomes a wreck on the high seas and the diabolical pursuer passes like a hurricane, the interest is cumulative.

The book has its quota of garrulous old salts, some of whom talk too much, others not enough. 'Mister Nightingale' promises well, but has little of value to say after his discourse anent the quantity of sail a ship may carry in a white squall off the coast of Guinea. The reader will find amusement in the other characters, notably Fid and that strange being, Scipio Africanus.

*The Water-Witch* concerns a mysterious and beautiful smuggling brigantine with a wonderful gift for eluding Her Majesty's revenue cruiser under command of Captain Ludlow. The time is the close of Lord Cornbury's administration, the scene, New York harbor and the adjacent estuaries. The story is fantastic and melodramatic,



## JAMES FENIMORE COOPER

and the dialogue stilted, even for Cooper. Compared with *The Red Rover*, a romance like *The Water-Witch* is hard reading. With such characters as Alderman Van Beverout, Alida de Barbérie, and 'Seadrift' with her epicene beauty, it is not surprising that *The Water-Witch* should have been dramatized.

*The Two Admirals* is an engaging picture of manly affection. He who has made the acquaintance of Sir Gervaise Oakes and his friend Richard Bluewater is to be congratulated, for a more sterling-hearted pair of worthies is seldom to be found. Other pleasant company may be had for the asking; the aged baronet Sir Wycherly Wychemcombe, hospitable to excess, bemoaning the inconvenience of not having a satisfactory heir, and wondering why his brother never married, though he had never given himself the trouble to undergo the discipline of wedlock. Agreeable in their several ways are Mildred Dutton, Wycherly Wychemcombe the young Virginian, and Galleygo the top man turned steward, he of the picturesque language. The story has a conventional plot, and one is supposed to be eager to know the validity of the Virginian's claim to the ancient estate of the Wychemcombes. The plot is in danger of being forgotten when Cooper carries his people to sea, and describes the action between French and English fleets off Cape la Hogue.

*Wing-and-Wing* relates the adventures of a



## WING-AND-WING

French privateer in the Mediterranean in 1798. One has not to read far before becoming enamoured of the diabolical little lugger and her audacious captain. As creatures of romance go, the good-humored and handsome Raoul Yvard (alias 'Sir 'Smees') is real and attractive. His arguments with Ghita (they talk theology not at all after the manner of Mrs. Humphry Ward's characters) move one to turn the pages hurriedly. Raoul may be forgiven; Ghita drove him to it, being orthodox and fond of proselyting. One can always take refuge with the vice-governatore and the podestà. These worthies are long-winded, but it were unfair to call them dull.

Ithuel Bolt, that long-legged, loose-jointed son of the Granite State, is new in Cooper's gallery of seamen. He makes an interesting figure in the wine-shop at Porto Ferrajo, his chair, creaking under his weight, tipped back on two legs against the wall, the uprights digging into the plaster, his knees apart, 'you fancy how,' and his long arms over the backs of neighboring chairs, giving him a resemblance to a spread eagle. Next to the wine of the country, which he abuses while succumbing to its influence, he detests the saints. Filippo, the Genoese sailor, undertakes a feeble defence. Says the Yankee: 'A saint is but a human — 'a man like you and me, after all the fuss you 'make about 'em. Saints abound in my country, if you'd believe people's account of them-

## JAMES FENIMORE COOPER

'selves.' Cooper says that Bolt, after his return to America, became a deacon. This is no more incredible than the statement that he also became a teetotaler.

The pages of old reviews would probably show how Cooper's delineation of Englishmen affected English readers. Our cousins over the water must have been difficult if they quarrelled with the spirit in which the portraits of Cuffe, Griffin, Winchester, and Clinch were painted, all being good men and true in their various capacities. In describing Nelson and the 'Lady Admiraleess' the novelist undertook a difficult task. He was adroit enough to avoid bringing the famous beauty too often on the stage.

*Afloat and Ashore* and *Miles Wallingford* form a continuous story of almost a thousand pages. There is a mixture of love and adventure, the love being depicted as Cooper usually does it, neither better nor worse, and the sea-episodes as only Cooper could do them.

A capital passage in *Afloat and Ashore* is that describing the encounter with the savages off the coast of South America. Even more spirited are those chapters of *Miles Wallingford* in which the young captain of the 'Dawn' relates how he was overhauled successively by a British man-of-war, a French privateer, and a piratical lugger, and how he escaped them all only to be wrecked at last in the Irish Sea. Among a dozen or so of characters

## THE BRAVO

Marble is a typical Cooper seaman, a man of many resources, as witness how he outwitted Sen-nit. He was patriotic too, and on his first visit to London was chagrined at being obliged to admit that St. Paul's was better than anything they had in Kennebunk.

### VII

#### OLD-WORLD ROMANCE AND NEW- WORLD SATIRE

*THE BRAVO, THE HEIDENMAUER, THE HEADS-MAN, HOMEWARD BOUND, HOME AS FOUND*

*The Bravo* was the first of a group of stories on themes suggested to their author during his stay on the Continent. It deals with Venetian life during the decline of the Republic. Jacopo Frontoni, the reputed bravo, becomes party to the iniquitous system which conceals crimes committed in the interest of the oligarchy, by throwing the suspicion on himself, all to the end that he may save his aged father, unjustly imprisoned by the state. Under this odium Jacopo lives until life becomes unendurable. At the moment he is meditating flight he is himself enmeshed in the toils and dies by the hand of the public executioner. A power which holds that it can do no wrong has a short

*JAMES FENIMORE COOPER*

way with servants who might betray its tortuous policy.

Jacopo comes too near to being a saint. He would have been more lifelike had he been guilty of one at least of the twenty-five murders laid at his door. Even a hired assassin of the Fifteenth Century might show filial piety.

His fate more or less involves that of the old fisherman of the lagoons, Antonio, a representative of that helpless, oppressed class which is without rights save the right of being punished if it does not obey. Antonio is a nobly pathetic character, one of the finest to which Cooper's imagination has given being. His patience, his love for the grandchild taken from him by the state to serve in the galleys, his courage in pleading before the Doge and even in the dread presence of the Council of Three that the boy may be given back to him until he has been formed in habits of virtue, are strong and beautiful traits.

Violetta and Don Camillo furnish the love motive, without which a romance of Venice were barren. We sympathize with them and rejoice in their escape. More than this the author could not ask.

That the story contains anachronisms admits of no doubt. It may be that the arraignment of the oligarchy is too unrelieved. On the other hand, the virtues of the narrative are many. The movement is rapid, the sentences clear, the various

## THE HEADSMAN

strands of interest artfully woven, and the conclusion inevitable and dramatic.

*The Heidenmauer* deals with the manners and the antagonisms of the time when the schism of Luther was undermining the Church. Far less engrossing than its predecessor and weighted with a cumbrous style, the book has its right valiant warriors and militant churchmen, its burghers, peasants, and other dramatis personæ of German romance. There are characters like Gottlob and old Ilse whose speech is always fresh and agreeable. The French abbé is voluble and might have been wittier. That one does not sit down to a table spread with an intellectual feast like that served in *The Monastery* or *The Abbot*, is no reason for disdaining the fare served in *The Heidenmauer*.

In *The Headsman* we follow the story of a high-born girl who has given her heart to a young soldier of fortune only to discover in him the son of that most loathed of beings, the official executioner of Berne. The office is hereditary, and were the youth's real condition known the odious duties would in time fall on him. It is a foregone conclusion that Sigismund shall be found to be of noble birth, and Adelheid's reward proportioned to the greatness of her soul. This is but one thread of a fairly complicated and romantic plot. The interest of the narrative is well sustained and the dénouement unanticipated. None of these three romances is, strictly speaking, a novel of purpose,



## JAMES FENIMORE COOPER

and the least attractive deserves friendlier critical treatment than is commonly accorded it.

In the same group may be placed *Mercedes of Castile*, which, if it cannot hold the attention by reason of the loves of Don Luis de Bobadilla and Mercedes, and the fate of the unfortunate Ozema, may be read (by whoever can take history well diluted with fiction) for the story of Columbus's first voyage.

*The Monikins* contrasts the ways of men with the ways of monkeys, much to the disadvantage of men. Really it is no duller than some of the professed satire of the present day; it is merely longer and more desperately serious.

*Homeward Bound* and *Home as Found* form two parts of a single novel. The satire of the first part is forgotten in the movement of the narrative, the sea-chase, the wreck off the African coast, the fight with the Arabs. The second part is a diatribe on New York and Cooperstown in particular, and America in general. The chief characters, the Effinghams, mean well, but 'they have an unfortunate manner,' and their disagreeable traits are not so piquant as to be entertaining. Steadfast Dodge, the editor, is almost as unreal as the Effinghams. Captain Truck is a genuine brother man, resourceful as master of the 'Montauk,' and not helpless when figuring (without his connivance) as a great English author, at Mrs. Legend's literary soirée.



## THE NAVAL HISTORY

Horatio Greenough had the 'Effingham' books in mind when he wrote to Cooper: 'I think you 'lose hold on the American public by rubbing 'down their shins with brickbats as you do.'

### VIII

#### TRAVELS, HISTORY, POLITICAL WRITINGS AND LATEST NOVELS

COOPER was a giant of productivity. Some brief comment has been made on twenty-three of his novels. It is impossible in the limits of this study to do much beyond giving the titles of his remaining books.

*The History of the Navy of the United States of America* begins with 'the earliest American sea-fight' (May, 1636), when John Gallop in a sloop of twenty tons captured a pinnace manned by thieving Indians, and closes with the War of 1812. The noteworthy features of the book are accuracy, independence, severity of style, and freedom from spread-eagleism. The brief *Chronicles of Coopers-town*, written in a plain way, has the natural interest attaching to the subject and the author.

*A Letter to his Countrymen*, partly autobiographical, is absorbing in its bitter earnestness. *The Travelling Bachelor* purports to be the letters of a cosmopolite, a man of fifty, to various mem-

## JAMES FENIMORE COOPER

bers of his club, recounting his travels in the United States. The book is historical, statistical, argumentative. It treats of government, manners, art, literature, of fashions in dress and of peculiarities of speech. As an attempt on the part of a man of strong prejudices to take an objective view of his own country, it is singularly interesting. Were its seven hundred closely printed pages lightened with humor or relieved by any grace of expression, *The Travelling Bachelor* would be a vastly entertaining work.

*The American Democrat* is a collection of short essays, forty-five in number, on the American republic, liberty, parties, public opinion, property, the press, demagogues, the decay of manners, individuality, aristocrat and democrat, pronunciation, slavery, etc., etc. The tone of the comments is intentionally censorious, and often proves exasperating. Having been long absent from America, Cooper found himself to a certain degree 'in the 'situation of a foreigner in his own country.' On this account he was prepared to note peculiarities. Praise and blame are mingled. *The American Democrat* sets forth high ideals, as may be seen, for example, in the suggestive essay on party. The book is courageous but wanting in suavity.

*Sketches of Switzerland* and *Gleanings in Europe*, comprising ten volumes in the original editions, are studies of Continental and English life. They contain a multitude of spirited, pungent, and true

## SATANSTOE

observations. Lacking the 'antiseptic of style,' the books are no longer read.

Between 1845 and 1850 Cooper published eight novels. Three of the eight, *Satanstoe*, *The Chain-bearer*, and *The Redskins*, are narratives supposed to be drawn from the 'Littlepage Manuscripts.' The first is not only the best, but is also one of the most genial of all Cooper's novels. Corny Littlepage had attractive friends, such as the mettlesome youth Guert Ten Eyck, a splendid specimen of the free-handed, royally generous Dutch-American. Jason Newcome, on the other hand, embodies Cooper's never latent hostility to New England. The pictures of old days in New York and Albany are brilliant and highly finished, and the encounter with the Indians in Cooper's most spirited vein.

*The Crater* is a history of the adventures of Mark Woolston of Bristol, Bucks County, Pennsylvania, who was shipwrecked on a volcanic island in the Pacific, and with the able seaman Bob Betts set himself to solve the problem of existence. What with gardening, poultry-raising, boat-building, tempests, earthquakes, exploration of neighboring islands, colonization, savages, and pirates, the book resolves itself into one of the infinite variations of *Robinson Crusoe*. After twenty-nine chapters of this sort of thing comes an absurd and irrelevant conclusion.

All the later novels, *Jack Tier*, *The Sea Lions*, *Oak Openings*, and *The Ways of the Hour*, are hard

## JAMES FENIMORE COOPER

reading, yet the least happy of them has passages betraying the master's hand. *The Sea Lions* stands out by virtue of the powerful descriptions of an Antarctic winter; but neither Captain Spike's mission to the gulf, nor the revelation of fat, profane Jack's true station and sex, nor yet the malapropisms of Mrs. Budd (she would say 'It blew what 'they call a Hyson in the Chinese seas'), can make *Jack Tier* more than tolerable.

Cooper's greatest achievements were his stories of the sea and the forest. His real creations are sailors, backwoodsmen, old soldiers, and Indians. Whether his red men are conceived in the spirit of modern ethnological science can matter but little now. They are neither so close to Chateaubriand's idealized savage, nor so far from the real Indian as is generally believed. That Cooper had no skill in representing contemporary society is plain enough; but the failure of *Home as Found* need not have been as complete as it was. Haste and anger must bear the blame of that literary disaster. Where he deals with manners of the past, as in *Satanstoe*, he is often most felicitous. With his novel of *The Bravo* he was in line with the Romantic movement. How far he comprehended that movement, or was influenced by it, is a more intricate problem.

Modern literature can show but few authors more popular than Cooper. He has been praised

## *CONCLUSION*

extravagantly ; but the fact that Miss Mitford thought him as good as Scott ought not to prejudice us against him. And he has been damned without measure ; but over against Mark Twain's unchivalrous attack on his great fellow countryman may be set the royally generous tributes of Balzac and of Dumas.





IV

*George Bancroft*



# George Bancroft

## I

### HIS LIFE

**T**HE Bancrofts have been settled in America since 1632. Among the historian's ancestors were men of marked traits of character. Bancroft's grandfather, a farmer of Essex County, Massachusetts, had such a reputation for piety and judgment that he was called on to act as an umpire in the bitter dispute between Jonathan Edwards and his church at Northampton.

The father of the historian, Aaron Bancroft, a pioneer of American Unitarianism, was for fifty years pastor of the Second Church of Worcester. His distinguishing trait was 'a deep-seated abhorrence of anything like mental slavery.' He was an ardent student of American history and the author of an *Essay on the Life of George Washington*

**W. M. Sloane:** 'George Bancroft in Society, in Politics, in Letters,' 'The Century Magazine,' January, 1887.

**S. S. Green:** 'George Bancroft,' *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society*, April 29, 1891.

**A. McF. Davis:** 'George Bancroft,' *Proceedings of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences*, vol. xxvi, 1891.

## GEORGE BANCROFT

(1807), a popular book in its own day and well worth the reading in ours. George Bancroft thought 'that 'his own inclination toward history was due very 'much to the influence of his father.'

There is a story (probably apocryphal) that in his youth Aaron Bancroft fought at Lexington and Bunker Hill. During Shays's Rebellion, when the insurgent officers proposed to quarter themselves in private houses at Worcester, the minister guarded his own door and told a group of officers who approached that they were rebels, and that 'they would obtain no entrance to his house but 'by violence.' The officers immediately rode away.

George Bancroft was born at Worcester on October 3, 1800. He prepared for college at Phillips Academy, Exeter, New Hampshire, and was graduated at Harvard in 1817. Edward Everett, the newly appointed professor of Greek, who was then studying at Göttingen, urged President Kirkland to send some graduate of marked powers to Germany with a view to his preparing himself to teach at Harvard. The choice fell on Bancroft. He spent two years at Göttingen and obtained his doctorate. Among his professors were Heeren, Dissen, Eichhorn, and Blumenbach; Heeren's influence was the most profound and the most lasting. His range of studies was wide, including, as it did, history, German literature, Greek philosophy, natural history, Scripture interpretation, Arabic, Syriac, and Persian.

## BANCROFT'S LIFE

From Göttingen, Bancroft went to Berlin, where he heard the lectures of Savigny, Schleiermacher, and Hegel, and made the acquaintance of Voss, W. von Humboldt, and F. A. Wolf. He had the fortune to meet Goethe once at Jena, and again at Weimar. After leaving Berlin he studied for a time at Heidelberg under Von Schlosser. In Paris he met Cousin, Constant, and A. von Humboldt. He travelled in Switzerland and Italy, and spent the winter of 1821-22 at Rome, where he made the acquaintance of Niebuhr and Bunsen. At Leghorn the following spring he was one of a party of Americans who gathered to meet Byron when the poet visited the 'Constitution,' the flagship of the American squadron. Bancroft afterwards called on Byron at Montenero, and was presented to the Countess Guiccioli.

In the fall of 1822 Bancroft became a tutor of Greek at Harvard. The following year he resigned his position, not to enter the ministry in accordance with his father's wishes, but to become a schoolmaster. He joined his friend, Joseph G. Cogswell (the directing spirit in the enterprise), in founding a school for boys at Round Hill, Northampton. Emerson, then a youth of twenty, heard Bancroft preach at the 'New South' in Boston soon after his return from Germany, and was 'delighted with his eloquence.' 'He needs a great deal of cutting and pruning, but we think him an 'infant Hercules.' Emerson deplored Bancroft's

## GEORGE BANCROFT

new departure, 'because good schoolmasters are 'as plenty as whortleberries, but good ministers 'assuredly are not, and Bancroft might be one of 'the best.'

On the eve of leaving Cambridge, Bancroft published, under the title of *Poems*, a volume of correct if not inspired verse. At Northampton his literary activity found more sober expression in text-books, in papers for the 'North American 'Review' and Walsh's 'American Quarterly,' and in a careful translation of Heeren's *Politics of Ancient Greece* (1824). At the celebration of Independence Day at Northampton in 1826, Bancroft was the orator. He chanted the present glory of America, predicted a golden future, and declared his faith in a 'determined uncompromising democracy.' These notes were to be heard again and often in his great history.

Round Hill, though prosperous in many ways, was not a success financially, nor were the partners wholly congenial. After seven years Bancroft withdrew from the school and began writing the book on which his fame rests. In 1834 appeared the first volume of *A History of the United States from the discovery of the American continent to the present time*. The second volume was published in 1837, the third in 1840.

The historian removed to Springfield and became prominent in state politics. He was an ardent Democrat and a strong opponent of slavery.



## *BANCROFT'S LIFE*

Elected without his knowledge to the legislature, he refused to take his seat; he also declined a nomination to the senate. It is said that he took this attitude with respect to office-holding out of deference to the feelings of his wife, Sarah (Dwight) Bancroft, who came of a prominent Whig family. Mrs. Bancroft died in 1837.<sup>1</sup> Appointed Collector of the Port of Boston by President Van Buren, Bancroft held the office from 1838 to 1841, and administered its affairs with a thoroughness theretofore unknown, and in a way incidentally to reflect great credit on the profession of letters.

In 1844 Bancroft was the Democratic candidate for governor of Massachusetts and polled a large vote, but was defeated by George N. Briggs. A year later he became Secretary of the Navy under President Polk. In the exercise of his duties he gave the order to take possession of California, and as acting Secretary of War the order to General Taylor to occupy Texas.

During his secretaryship Bancroft founded the United States Naval Academy at Annapolis. This he brought about not by asking Congress to authorize its establishment, but by so interpreting the powers granted him under the law that he was able to set in operation a school for the training of midshipmen and offer it to Congress for approval. Once the school was established and its usefulness

<sup>1</sup> Bancroft was twice married. His second wife was Mrs. Elisabeth (Davis) Bliss.

## GEORGE BANCROFT

proved, there was no difficulty in securing funds for adequate equipment. The Academy was formally opened on October 10, 1845.

From 1846 to 1849 Bancroft was minister to England. There were important diplomatic problems to be solved, but his triumphs were chiefly literary and social. He accumulated a rich store of documents, and on his return to America made his home in New York and devoted himself anew to the *History*.<sup>1</sup> The fourth volume appeared in 1852; the fifth in 1853; the sixth in 1854; the seventh in 1858; the eighth in 1860; the ninth in 1866; the tenth and concluding volume in 1874. His *Literary and Historical Miscellanies* appeared in 1855.

When the New York Historical Society celebrated the close of the first half-century of its existence (1854), Bancroft was the orator. His address on that occasion, 'The Necessity, the Reality, 'and the Promise of the Progress of the Human 'Race,' has been pronounced the best exposition of his historical creed.<sup>2</sup>

Bancroft was a strong Union man and during the Civil War acted with the Republican party. He declined a nomination to Congress from the eighth district of New York (October, 1862), on the

<sup>1</sup> For an account of the privileges he enjoyed in making his collections see Winsor's *Narrative and Critical History of America*, vol. viii, p. 477.

<sup>2</sup> W. M. Sloane.

## *BANCROFT'S LIFE*

ground that a multiplication of candidates would leave the result very much to chance ; there should be a union, he urged, of all those 'who feel deeply 'for their country in this her hour of peril.' At the close of the war he was chosen to pronounce the eulogy on Lincoln before Congress (February, 1866).

President Johnson, in 1867, appointed Bancroft minister to Prussia. Later he was accredited to the North German Confederation, and in 1872, following current political changes, to the German Empire. He brought about that notable treaty whereby Germans who had become citizens of the United States were freed from allegiance to the land of their birth. Never before by a 'formal act' had the principle of 'renunciation of citizenship at 'the will of the individual been recognized.' England followed Germany's example and gave over her claim of indefeasible allegiance. Another diplomatic triumph was the settlement of the Northwestern boundary dispute. While in Germany Bancroft celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of his graduation at Göttingen. The University gave him an honorary degree, and congratulations were showered on him from scholars, statesmen, princes, and men of letters.

After nearly eight years of service Bancroft was recalled from the German mission at his own request. He lived in Washington during the winter months and spent the summers at Newport as

## GEORGE BANCROFT

had long been his habit. The work of his later years included two revisions of the *History* (1876 and 1884), a *History of the Formation of the Constitution of the United States* (1882), *A Plea for the Constitution of the United States of America, wounded in the House of its Guardians* (1886), and a sketch of the public life of Martin Van Buren (1889).

Bancroft died in Washington on January 17, 1891.

## II

### HIS CHARACTER

BANCROFT's character was fashioned on a large scale. His mental horizon was broad, his power to plan and carry out a vast undertaking was commensurate with the reach of his vision. There was little in his habit of thought to suggest the narrowness so often associated with the name of scholar. Yet he had the infinitely laborious powers of the mere scholar. He could toil with unflagging energy day by day or year by year.

The magisterial note in his historical writings is due not alone to the subject or to the literary manner, but also to the deliberate tenacity of purpose with which the historian wrought. Such a work is the product, not of feverish spasms of intellectual activity, but of even and steady effort.

## BANCROFT'S CHARACTER

Bancroft has been accused of a want of enthusiasm in receiving critical observations on his work. It is a question whether historians (more than philosophers) are wont to receive with rapture proofs that they are possibly in the wrong. Bancroft's tone of controversy is perhaps less peculiar to himself than is commonly asserted. However, it must be kept in mind that he had a 'strong nervous personality.'

Emerson described the greeting he had from Bancroft in London. When he presented himself at the minister's door, 'it was opened by Mr. Bancroft himself in the midst of servants whom that man of eager manners thrust aside, saying that he would open his own door for me. He was full of goodness and talk.' Other accounts of him give an impression of much stateliness of manner tempered by affability. Still others convey the idea that he was always artificial, and sometimes playful with a playfulness that bordered on frivolity. A friend<sup>1</sup> professed to detect in Bancroft's bearing marks of the man of letters, diplomat, politician, preacher and pedagogue, one trait superimposed on another. But the blend of characteristics was charming.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> T. W. Higginson in 'The Nation,' January, 1891.

<sup>2</sup> Bancroft's characteristics as a young man are admirably brought out in the recently printed selection from his letters and journals, edited by M. A. DeWolfe Howe. 'Scribner's Magazine,' September and October, 1905.



III

THE WRITER

THE charge brought against Bancroft of having embellished his themes with 'cheap rhetoric' is unjust. Rhetorical the historian undoubtedly was, but the rhetoric was not cheap. It had the merit of sincerity ; it was the result of an honest effort to present important facts and comments in becoming garb.

In 1834 the style thought appropriate to historical writing was markedly oratorical. Historians addressed their readers. A pomp of expression, something almost liturgical, was held seemly if not indeed of last importance. Reading their works, one involuntarily calls up a vision of grave gentlemen in much-wrinkled frock-coats, making stilted gestures, and looking even more unreal than their statues which now terrify posterity. Bancroft was affected by the prevailing drift towards oratorical forms. At times one is tempted to exclaim : ' This ' was not meant to be read but to be heard.'

Take for example this passage on Sebastian Cabot: ' He lived to an extreme old age and loved ' his profession to the last ; in the hour of death ' his wandering thoughts were upon the ocean. ' The discoverer of the territory of our country was ' one of the most extraordinary men of his age ;



## THE WRITER

‘there is deep cause for regret that time has spared  
‘so few memorials of his career. Himself incapable of jealousy, he did not escape detraction. He  
‘gave England a continent, and no one knows his  
‘burial place.’

Not to enter into the question whether this is good, or indifferent, or even bad writing, it is sufficient to note that the passage in question belongs to spoken discourse rather than to literature. It appeals to us, if at all, through the medium of the ear rather than the eye.

Take for another example the comparison of Puritan and Cavalier: Historians have loved to eulogize ‘the manners and virtues, the glory and  
‘the benefits of chivalry. Puritanism accomplished  
‘for mankind far more. If it had the sectarian  
‘crime of intolerance, chivalry had the vices of  
‘dissoluteness. The knights were brave from gallantry of spirit; the puritans from the fear of God.  
‘The knights were proud of loyalty, the puritans  
‘of liberty. The knights did homage to monarchs,  
‘in whose smile they beheld honor, whose rebuke  
‘was the wound of disgrace; the puritans, disdaining ceremony, would not bend the knee to the  
‘King of kings. The former valued courtesy; the  
‘latter justice. The former adorned society by  
‘graceful refinements; the latter founded national  
‘grandeur on universal education. The institutions of chivalry were subverted by the gradually  
‘increasing weight, and knowledge, and opulence,

## GEORGE BANCROFT

‘of the industrious classes; the puritans, relying  
‘on those classes, planted in their hearts the un-  
‘dying principles of democratic liberty.’

Passages such as these are often employed as a rhetorical flourish at the end of a chapter. They are analogous to what actors call ‘making a good ‘exit.’ In Bancroft they constitute for pages together the prevailing rather than the exceptional form. The reader, whether conscious of it or not, is kept on a strain. At last he grows uncomfortable. He wishes the historian would cease to declaim, would come down from the rostrum, throw aside his academic robes, and be neighborly and familiar.

This *History* was so long in the writing that Bancroft’s style changed materially. The opinion prevails that his diction improved as the work proceeded, that the later volumes are uniformly less inflated, strained, and ‘eloquent’ than the earlier ones. It is true that he made innumerable revisions of the text. The changes were not always improvements. Sometimes in rewriting a sentence he made it less energetic. Strong expressions were softened. A plain old-fashioned word would be taken out; often it carried the whole phrase with it. Whether the literary or the historical sense dictated the change in question cannot always be determined.

Bancroft’s diction is manly and forceful, but it lacks natural grace and suppleness; it is flexible

## BANCROFT'S HISTORY

as chain armor is flexible, but not as is the human body. It may be doubted whether he is ever read for literary pleasure. Nevertheless, scattered through these twelve volumes are hundreds of passages well worth the study of those who enjoy an exhibition of mastery in the use of words.

### IV

#### *THE HISTORY OF THE UNITED STATES*

ONE does well to read Bancroft in the tall, wide-margined, and almost sumptuous volumes of the original editions. The page is open and inviting. Both text and notes have a personal flavor very diverting at times. There is no question as to the usefulness of an attractive page in works of this sort. Political histories should be made easy, not by picture-book methods, but by the legitimate arts of good printing.

The work is generously planned. Twelve octavo volumes are required to bring the narrative down to the ratification of the constitution.<sup>1</sup> Three volumes, comprising nearly fifteen hundred pages, are given to the Colonial period alone.

Bancroft announced his theory of historical writing in the preface of 1834. He was to be controlled

<sup>1</sup> Two volumes of the original edition correspond to one volume of the 'author's last revision,' 1883-85.

## GEORGE BANCROFT

always by 'the principles of historical scepticism,' and his narrative was to be drawn 'from writings 'and sources which were contemporaries of the 'events that are described.' Nothing commonly supposed to belong to American history was to be retained merely because it had been unchallenged by former historians.

The treatment, as shown in these volumes on the Colonial period, is in perfect accord with the author's conception of the dignity of the subject. The matter is as stately as the manner. Bancroft writes history as a lord high chamberlain conducts a court function. He feels that during the ceremony of discovering a world and planting a nation there should be no unseemliness, certainly no laughter or disturbance.

The characters go through their evolutions like well-drilled courtiers. So stately are they as to appear scarce human. Homely and familiar traits are almost completely suppressed. The founders of America, as we see them looming in the pages of Bancroft, are not men but incarnate ideas. They are the embodiment of principles and virtues. Winthrop is enlightened conservatism, Vane is generous impetuosity, Roger Williams is liberty of conscience. Strive how we will to bring these men nearer, to make them tangible, the effort is not wholly successful. These figures of the past, like the characters of a morality-play, persist in remaining personified ideas.

## BANCROFT'S HISTORY

As a reaction against 'classical' history comes history of the gossiping school. 'Thanks to you,' said Brunetière, welcoming Masson to the French Academy, 'we now know the exact number of 'Napoleon's shirts.' Bancroft was not interested in the spindles and shoe-buckles of the Puritans. Many people are, but they must find elsewhere the gratification they seek. Whoever wishes at any time absolutely to escape anecdotage, homely detail, and piquant gossip, has it always in his power to do so; he can read Bancroft's three volumes on the Colonial period and dwell among abstractions.

Even if not at this stage of his career the most human of writers, Bancroft is a comforting historian to return to, after having dwelt for a while with those who instruct us how low and mercenary in motive, how impervious to liberal ideas, were the men who planted English civilization in America. Historical iconoclasts all, they are frightfully convincing. Some of their arguments lose a degree of force as it dawns on the reader that Seventeenth-century men are being judged by Nineteenth-century standards. When Bancroft wrote, the habit of abusing the ancestors had not become deep-seated.

Turning from the Colonial period, the historian takes up the period of the American Revolution. Seven volumes are required for telling the story. The logical arrangement is by 'epochs.' They are four in number: 'Overthrow of the European



## GEORGE BANCROFT

‘Colonial system,’ ‘How Great Britain estranged  
‘America,’ ‘America declares itself independent,’  
‘The Independence of America is acknowledged.’<sup>1</sup>

General histories must treat of many things, the doings of authorized and representative assemblies and the doings of the mob, skirmishes, battles by land and sea, diplomatic intrigues, party combinations, political and military plots, the characters of the actors in the historic drama, and the setting of the stage on which they played. While doing all parts of his task with workmanlike skill, a historian will be found to excel in this thing or in that. Bancroft’s accounts of military operations are always clear, energetic, and often extremely readable. He could not, like Irving, ‘render you a ‘fearful battle in music,’ but he never made the mistake of supposing that he could. He had not the graphical power of Parkman, but he had enough for his purposes.

His character sketches of the men who figured in the struggles for American independence are among the best parts of his writing. The patriots and their friends in England and on the Continent

<sup>1</sup> In the ‘last revision’ Epoch Four is divided into unequal parts and the titles are reworded: Epoch first, ‘Britain overthrows the ‘European colonial system,’ 1748–63; Epoch second, ‘Britain ‘estranges America,’ 1763–74; Epoch third, ‘America takes up ‘arms for self-defence and arrives at independence,’ 1774–76; Epoch fourth, ‘America in alliance with France,’ 1776–80; Epoch fifth, ‘The People of America take their equal station ‘among the powers of the earth,’ 1780 to December, 1782.



## BANCROFT'S HISTORY

are too uniformly creatures of light, but their opponents are not represented as necessarily creatures of darkness. If Bancroft could be more than fair to his own side, he was incapable of being wholly unfair to the other. His tendency is to regard human character as all of a piece, fixed rather than fluctuating. Men (politicians included) have been known to grow in virtue as they grow in years. Bancroft was over complacent in his attitude towards frenzied impromptu Revolutionary gatherings whose motives could not always have been so guiltlessly patriotic and disinterested as he represents them.<sup>1</sup> He was but little versed in the psychology of mobs.

Forceful at all points, Bancroft was singularly impressive in dealing with history as it is made in parliaments and conventions, in council chambers, cabinets, and courts of law. He was born to grapple with whole state paper offices. He knew the secret of subordinating a vast amount of detail to his main purpose. An important part of the American Revolution took place in Europe. Bancroft's capital merit consists in his having brought the event into its largest relations. The story as he told it did not merely concern the uprising of a few petty quarrelsome colonies, it became an im-

<sup>1</sup> J. F. Jameson speaks of Bancroft's 'tendency to conventionalize, to compose his American populations of highly virtuous 'Noah's-ark men.' *History of Historical Writing in America*, 1891, p. 108.

## GEORGE BANCROFT

portant chapter in the history of liberty. Not for an instant did he permit himself to lose sight of that 'idea of continuity which gives vitality to history.'

It is wonderful how through these seven volumes everything bends to one idea; how it all becomes part of a demonstration, a detail in the history of that spirit which, acting through discontent, led first to local outbreak and resistance, then to concerted action and war, and finally to the birth of a new nation.

The crown of Bancroft's work is the story of how the states parted with so much of their individuality as stood in the way of union, and then united. Two volumes would seem to afford room for full and leisurely treatment. But in fact the historian only accomplished his task by enormous compression. Often the substance of a speech had to be given in a sentence, and the deliberations of days in a few paragraphs. The marshalling of facts, the grasp of the subject in detail and as a whole, are extraordinary. Bancroft notes what forces led to union and what opposed it. He marks the shifting of public sentiment, the trembling of the balance, but he grants himself few privileges of the sort called literary. Seldom dramatic or picturesque in this portion of his narrative, he is at all times logically exact and magisterial.

There is a peculiar fitness in the word 'monumental' applied to Bancroft's work. It has solid-

## BANCROFT'S HISTORY

ity, strength, durability, a massive and stately grandeur. It is a book which the modern reader finds it easy to neglect; but he puts it in his library and never fails to commend it to his friends, with a hypocritical expression of surprise at their not being better acquainted with it. The truth is, we are spoiled by more attractive historians. Macaulay, Froude, and Parkman have made us indolent, fond of verbal comforts and disinclined to effort. We demand not only to be instructed but to be vastly entertained at the same time. Bancroft certainly instructs; it would be difficult to prove that he also entertains.

His tone of confident eulogy is often condemned. On the whole, this is a merit rather than a fault. Doubtless he admired too uniformly and too much. Many writers have taken pleasure in showing that his admiration was misplaced. And thus a balance is kept. It is a fortunate thing for American literature that Bancroft's vast work, destined to so wide an influence, and the fruit of such immense labor, should have been conceived and written in a generous and hopeful spirit. The English reviewer who on the appearance of the first volume praised the historian because he was 'so fearlessly honest and 'impartial' might also have praised him because he was so fearlessly optimistic. This too requires courage.



V

*William Hickling Prescott*





# *William Hickling Prescott*

## I

### HIS LIFE

THE Prescotts are an ancient family as antiquity is reckoned in the United States. The first Anglo-American of that name, John Prescott, an old Cromwellian soldier, took up residence in this country about 1640, and after living awhile at Watertown, Massachusetts, made a permanent home for himself at Lancaster, then a frontier settlement. When thieving Indians plundered him, it is said that he used to put on helmet, gorget, and cuirass, and start in pursuit. Being a powerful man and stern of countenance, his terrific appearance in his armor had a salutary effect on the red men.

Jonas Prescott, a son of the old warrior, settled at Groton, Massachusetts, and there the family history centres for more than a hundred years.

George Ticknor: *Life of William Hickling Prescott*, 1864.

Rollo Ogden: *William Hickling Prescott*, 'American Men of Letters,' 1904.

H. T. Peck: *William Hickling Prescott*, 'English Men of Letters,' 1905.

## WILLIAM HICKLING PRESCOTT

They were a vigorous race, useful and conspicuous in the military and civil affairs of the colony.

William Hickling Prescott, the historian, was born in Salem, Massachusetts, on May 4, 1796. His father, Judge William Prescott, was a man of eminent abilities, esteemed for his great legal acquirements and beloved for his personal worth. His mother, Catharine Hickling, a daughter of Thomas Hickling of Boston, was distinguished for energy and benevolence, as well as for a certain gayety of temperament, a trait which she transmitted to her famous son. The grandfather of the historian was Colonel William Prescott, founder of the town of Pepperell, who, on the night of June 16, 1775, with his force of a thousand men, threw up a redoubt on Bunker (Breed's) Hill, and on the following day defended it until defence was no longer possible.

Prescott was drilled in the classics by one of old Parr's pupils, the Reverend Doctor John Gardiner, rector of Trinity Church, Boston. He was an insatiable reader of books ; but it were idle to assume that his interest in Spanish history and literature took its first impulse, as has been asserted, from the reading of Southey's translation of *Amadis of Gaul*.

He entered Harvard College in the Sophomore year and was graduated in 1814. A misfortune befell him early in his course which changed his whole life and made enormous demands on his

## *PRESCOTT'S LIFE*

philosophy and courage. In one of the frolics attending the breaking up of commons, when small missiles were flying about the room, Prescott was struck full in the left eye with a hard crust of bread. The sight was instantly destroyed, and he lived for years in apprehension of what, fortunately, never overtook him, total blindness.

He began the study of law, but illness and consequent weakening of the power of vision put an end to it. In search of health and diversion he went abroad. After spending some months in the Azores, in the family of his maternal grandfather, Thomas Hickling, then United States consul at St. Michael's, he visited Italy, France, and England. In London he consulted eminent oculists, who were able, however, to give him but little encouragement.

Shortly after his return home he married Miss Susan Amory of Boston, whose maternal grandfather, Captain Linzee, was in command of a British sloop of war at the outbreak of the Revolution, and had cannonaded the redoubt on Bunker Hill. In 1821 Prescott planned a course of literary study. Beginning oddly enough with grammars and rhetorics, he followed this preliminary reading with a wide survey first of English literature, then of French and Italian. German he tried and gave up. With his enfeebled sight he could do but little of the actual reading for himself; the bulk of it had to be done for him.

## WILLIAM HICKLING PRESCOTT

Prescott's literary life was peculiar in that he prepared himself to become a man of letters with no definite conception of what he would write about. He was not, like the literary heroes of whom we read, so possessed of his subject from boyhood that all the ancient neighbors distinctly recall early evidences of his predilection. His first impulse towards the studies in which he won renown came from George Ticknor. To help Prescott pass away his time Ticknor read to his friend the lectures he had been giving to advanced classes at Harvard, lectures which formed the basis of his *History of Spanish Literature*. This was in 1824. Prescott became enthusiastic over the study of the Spanish language and history. A year later he was thinking what brilliant passages might be written on the Inquisition, the Conquest of Granada, and the exploits of the Great Captain. After balancing Italian and Spanish subjects against each other, he decided, not without misgivings, on a history of Ferdinand and Isabella, and early in 1826 wrote to Alexander H. Everett, United States minister at Madrid, asking his help in collecting materials.

Three and a half years of study preceded the writing of the first chapter; ten and a half years in all were required to make the book. Its enthusiastic reception from scholars and public alike led Prescott to take up cognate subjects. The list of his writings is brief, but, taking into account

## PRESCOTT'S LIFE

the difficulties involved, one may say without exaggeration that Prescott's historical works represent a labor little short of titanic.

The *History of the Reign of Ferdinand and Isabella the Catholic* appeared in 1837. It was followed by *The Conquest of Mexico*, 1843; *Critical and Historical Essays*, 1845 (consisting chiefly of papers reprinted from the 'North American Review'); *The Conquest of Peru*, 1847; *The History of Philip the Second*, 1855 (left unfinished at the author's death). To this list of important works may be added a brief continuation of Robertson's *Charles the Fifth*, and a *Memoir of Abbott Lawrence*.

Prescott's life was without marked external incident. His surroundings were ideal. Having inherited a fortune, he could give himself to toilsome literary undertakings with no care for the financial result. He took satisfaction in the thought of having refuted Johnson's dictum that no man could write history unless he had good eyes.

Early in 1858 Prescott was stricken with apoplexy, but so far recovered as to be able to resume work on the *History of Philip the Second*. A second attack (January 27, 1859) ended in his death.



II

PRESCOTT'S CHARACTER

To those who knew him in varying degrees of intimacy, whether as friends, neighbors, or chance acquaintance, Prescott seemed the incarnation of urbanity, thoughtfulness, good humor. To us who know him only through the story of his life he seems notable for his heroic qualities.

He had enormous courage and force of will. That other men have performed great tasks under like difficulties cannot lessen the glory of his individual achievement. Handicapped by partial blindness, he wrote history, a type of literature which makes the most exacting demands on the physical powers.

Had Prescott's genius inclined him towards poetry or fiction, the heroic element in his literary life would have been less noteworthy. In general a novelist is not expected to read ; what is chiefly required of him in the way of preparation is, that he shall observe, feel, and occasionally think — but not read ; much reading makes a dull storyteller. The novelist gleans material as he walks the street. For his purpose an hour of talk with 'a set of wretched un-idea'd girls,' as Doctor Johnson half affectionately, half pettishly, called them, is worth ten hours over a book. History is an-



## *PRESCOTT'S CHARACTER*

other matter. The historian must often read a thousand pages in order to write one. And the work of preparation is indescribably exhausting; there is so much detail to set in order, so many documents to be consulted, such a wilderness of notes to be arranged, compared, and fitted into place. The task, difficult under the best conditions, must seem endless to any one with an imperfect sense.

A man with good eye-sight is like a man with the free use of his legs, he goes where he pleases. But a scholar with defective vision is an invalid in a wheeled chair. Prescott, being denied one of the greatest conveniences of study, was forced to try expedients. With most writers pen and ink are an indispensable aid to composition. Prescott used memory instead. Not only was the knowledge accumulated, arranged, and weighed, but it was put into literary form, the paragraphs measured and the sentences polished before the actual writing was begun. Prescott often carried in his head, for days at a time, the equivalent of sixty pages of printed text, and on occasion, seventy-five pages. Only by reflecting on the difficulties met and overcome can the amateur of literature arrive at a conception of Prescott's indomitable courage.

Add to force and persistency of purpose another notable trait, a passion for nobility of character. Prescott, unwearied in self-examination, studied his own moral nature as he studied the pages of

his manuscript, that he might weed out the faults. The methods he employed to this end were often whimsical, and even childlike ; but in their touching simplicity lies the best proof of the genuineness of the motive that prompted them.

### III

#### THE WRITER

PRESCOTT gave unusual measure of time and thought to the problem of expression. With a view to grounding himself in the technical part of literature, he invoked the aid of those now forgotten worthies, Lindley Murray and Hugh Blair — how greatly to his advantage would be difficult to say. Books of this sort are so often disfigured by a vicious or, what is worse, a commonplace style that it is a question whether one does not lose by example all that he gains by precept.

Escaping these influences, Prescott took up the chief English authors, beginning with Ascham, Sidney, Bacon, Browne, Raleigh, and Milton. His mind was constantly on the alert to discover by what means these masters produced their effects. His journals show how painstaking he was in these studies, with what intense interest he turned the problem of the art of expression over and over in his mind.

## PRESCOTT THE WRITER

When he came to print, it was observed first of all that he had a 'style.' The self-conscious literary workman was plainly visible. Prescott had evidently aimed to produce certain effects through the balance of his periods, the choice of his words, the length and structure of his sentences. Every one said: 'He is an artist.' Praise could not have been more aptly bestowed. Among many eminent artists in words Prescott was one of the most conscientious.

But the literary style of the *Ferdinand and Isabella* had the defect of being too apparent. One often found himself taking note of the manner of expression before he took note of the thought. The panoply of words glittered from afar. It was brilliant but metallic, magnificent but artificial.

The criticism of his first book taught Prescott the futility of worrying about style — after one has worried sufficiently. He was no less anxious to improve; he noted the mannerisms into which he had fallen, resolved to correct them, and that was the conclusion of the whole matter. He stopped dwelling overmuch on the fashion of his writing, and at once gained in ease and naturalness. After ten years of labor he had mastered the materials of his art. His workmanship improved to the last. The volumes of the *History of Philip the Second* have literary characteristics so gracious as to add sharpness to the regret that this noble work had to be left unfinished.

IV

THE HISTORIES

THE *Ferdinand and Isabella* is not a formidable book for size. A timid reader, shrinking from fifteen hundred pages of any literature but fiction, need not fear mortgaging too much of his time in the perusal. Compared with a reading of Freeman's *Norman Conquest* or Carlyle's *Frederick*, his task is light.

In an introductory section Prescott traces the growth of Castile and Aragon, with their dependencies, up to the time when Ferdinand and Isabella come on the stage of history. Perhaps there is a lack of detail here and there. One would like to know the steps of the process by which the Spaniards regained the territory from which they had been driven by the Saracenic invasion of the Eighth Century. Bitter as were the jealousies and quarrels of the various petty states, they made common cause against the Mohammedans. They hated the hereditary enemy both as infidels and usurpers. Hatred fostered the national spirit.

The history proper is divided into two parts. The first has chiefly to do with the internal policy of Ferdinand and Isabella. It was the period when law displaced anarchy. The law might be severe or even unjust, but it was at all events law. Here

## *FERDINAND AND ISABELLA*

is shown how the power of the nobles was curbed, warring factions pacified, banditti of all sorts kept within bounds, and that too whether they lived in castles or lurked in dark corners, heresy suppressed in a truly rigorous fashion, above all the national ideal strengthened. To use a homely figure, Ferdinand and Isabella took up the problem of national housekeeping and handled it as it had never been handled before. A reign of order and economy was inaugurated. Thieving servants were put under restraint or discharged, poachers were apprehended, and the gypsies who had impudently camped on the best part of the estates were driven off. A government which for years had run at loose ends was now under masterful control.

The second part illustrates the foreign policy of the two monarchs. Having made a nation out of an assemblage of turbulent states, Ferdinand and Isabella were enabled to take a conspicuous place among the sovereigns of Europe. By good fortune in war and in discovery, by diplomatic shrewdness and religious zeal, their influence was felt throughout Europe and over the seas. Spain was no longer isolated. Her name carried weight ; her will was respected.

Much of the narrative proceeds by divisions each of which might have been printed as a monograph. A certain amount of space is given to the Inquisition, so much to the war in Granada, so



## WILLIAM HICKLING PRESCOTT

many chapters to the history of Columbus, so many to the colonial policy, to the Italian wars, to the life of Gonsalvo of Cordova, to the career of Cardinal Ximenes.

While in no sense neglecting the constitutional side of the problems before him, the historian's bent is to the biographical and pictorial phases of the reign. On these he dwells with satisfaction and often in detail. To him history is a pageant. The rich coloring of the period first attracted Prescott; he can hardly be blamed for painting his canvas in lively hues, for so he conceived the design. Neutral tints and dull tones are wholly wanting. The blackness of certain events only serves to bring out in stronger relief the resplendent brightness of virtuous acts and the goodness of noble characters. Torquemada offsets Isabella; the cruelty of war is forgotten in the splendor of chivalric deeds.

It is not a history of the people of Spain. The people are not forgotten; the struggle of the commons for recognition, for justice, for the right to be themselves and express their individuality — these things are taken into account. But the work belongs rather to that older school of history which concerns itself for the most part with wars and royal progresses, with the intrigues of councillors, the machinations of prelates, the rivalries of great houses and powerful orders.

The *History of the Conquest of Mexico* is of about



## CONQUEST OF MEXICO

the same length as its predecessor. The narrative, simpler in some ways and more vivacious in others, is gorgeously colored throughout. Prescott was disturbed by the picturesqueness of his own treatment. 'Very like Miss Porter' and 'Rather 'boarding schoolish finery' were his comments on certain chapters.

The first of the seven 'books' into which the work is divided contains an account of Aztec civilization. Sixty years have elapsed since these pages were written, during which time American archæology has made great advances. That the value of Prescott's introduction is not wholly destroyed is due to the healthy sceptical spirit which controlled his work.

The story has every element of romance. A young Spanish gentleman, handsome, witty, daring, an idler in college and a libertine, joins the army of adventurers in the New World. For ten or fifteen years he leads the life of men of his class. He becomes a planter in Hayti and varies the monotony of watching Indians till the soil by suppressing insurrections of their brother Indians.

He goes to Cuba as secretary to the governor of that island, quarrels with his chief, makes his peace, and quarrels with him again. Thrown repeatedly into prison, he escapes with the ease of a Baron Trenck. Reconciled to the governor, he is appointed to lead an expedition into the newly discovered kingdom of Mexico. On this venture

*WILLIAM HICKLING PRESCOTT*

he stakes his every penny. With five hundred soldiers he proposes to subdue the natives; two priests go along to convert the natives as fast as they are subdued. His sailors number one hundred and ten; his pilot had served under Columbus.

Arriving on the coast, he secretly scuttles his ships, all but one, that there may be no retreat, and then begins that wonderful march to the great city of the Aztecs. He fights by craft as well as by physical force. The jealousy of mutually hostile tribes helps to win his battles. Superstition comes to his aid, for the Spaniards are thought to be gods, and the horses they bestride carry terror into the hearts of the natives.

At length he makes his entry into the city of flowers, and takes up his abode there, Cortés and his little army of four hundred and fifty Spaniards, with twice as many native allies, among sixty thousand cannibals. Boldness marks every step of his course. He seizes the native 'king,' suppresses plots with rigor, and proves his divinity by tearing down one of the sacrificial pyramids and planting the cross in its stead. Leaving a lieutenant in command, he hastens back to the seashore to transact military business there. The lieutenant precipitates a quarrel and slaughters Indians by the hundred. Cortés returns and finds his work must be done again. This time it is thoroughly done. Every step of his progress is marked with

## CONQUEST OF MEXICO

blood, and the story of *la noche triste* and the siege of Mexico are among the most romantic passages in the history of the New World.

In estimating men Prescott aimed to employ the standard of their day. When Cortés lifts up his hands, red with the blood of the miserable natives, to return thanks to Heaven for victory, the historian does not permit himself to forget that this savage Spaniard was a typical soldier of the Cross. 'Whoever has read the correspondence of Cortés, or, still more, has attended to the circumstances of his career, will hardly doubt that he would have been among the first to lay down his life for the Faith.' According to Prescott, the charge of cruelty cannot be brought against Cortés. 'The path of the conqueror is necessarily marked with blood. He was not too scrupulous, indeed, in the execution of his plans. He swept away the obstacles which lay in his track; and his fame is darkened by the commission of more than one act which his boldest apologists will find it hard to vindicate. But he was not wantonly cruel. He allowed no outrage on his unresisting foes.' The historian likens the Spaniard to Hannibal in his endurance, his courage, and his unpretentiousness.

Later scholarship has assailed portions of *The Conquest of Mexico* with needless asperity. Prescott could hardly be expected to avail himself prophetically of archæological facts not known until

thirty years after his time. Nor was his faith in the early Spanish accounts of the Conquest quite as childlike and uncritical as it is sometimes represented. Historians are the most substantial of men of letters ; but they now and then build card houses which topple down under the breath of a single new fact. And they take a very human delight in blowing over one another's structures. For which reason the reading of history is a fearful joy, like skating on thin ice. The pleasure is intense so long as nothing gives way. Perhaps the layman is unreasonable in his demand for knowledge that shall not require too frequent revision. He can at least read for pleasure, hoping that a part of what he reads is true, and holding himself prepared to relinquish the parts he likes best when the time comes.

In the *History of the Conquest of Peru* the author brings fresh proof that whatever may be said of his morals, the Spanish soldier cannot be overpraised for his valor. Pizarro was a marvel of courage and endurance. Fanaticism, which explains much in his character, does not explain where such tremendous physical power came from. And he had the true theatrical bravado of the Sixteenth-century adventurer. Add to the native histrionic gifts of the Latin race a special training, such as life in the New World gave, and men like Ojeda, Balboa, Cortés, and Pizarro come into existence quite naturally. They did wonders in the coolest

## CONQUEST OF PERU

possible way, and with a fine sense of the pictorial aspect of their undertakings. Pizarro, drawing a line from east to west on the sand with his sword and calling on his comrades to choose each man what best becomes a brave Castilian ('For my part 'I go to the south'), is a figure for romantic drama. An Englishman equally daring would have been more or less awkward in a pose of this sort, but the Spaniard was perfectly at home. Of what clay were these men compounded that they could imagine such exploits and succeed in them too?

The performance of Pizarro was less splendid than that of Cortés and the man himself less interesting. The conqueror of Mexico was a gentleman; not so the hard soldier who subdued the kingdom of the Incas. His was a violent career, steeped in blood, and ending in assassination. Not only was Pizarro without fear, but of two courses he seized upon the more dangerous as the better suited to his genius. Too ignorant to sign his own name, he could control not alone the brutal soldier but as well the lawyer and the priest. Aside from his masterfulness there was little to admire in his character. Brute force excites wonder, but the exhibition of it becomes wearisome at last. To Prescott 'the hazard assumed by Pizarro was far 'greater than that of the Conqueror of Mexico.' Otherwise the man was a mere bungler upon whom Fortune, with characteristic levity, chanced for a time to smile. Prescott describes him in a sentence:



‘Pizarro was eminently perfidious.’ Furthermore, the conqueror of Peru was not original; he repeated what he had learned from Balboa and Cortés. Had he chanced upon a country less rich and civilized, it may well be doubted whether he would have made any considerable figure in history. The argument from gold was entirely conclusive in those days; just as at the present time an undertaking is said to ‘succeed’ if it pays financially. Manners have improved, but ideals of ‘success’ are pretty much what they were four hundred years ago. When Pizarro extorted from the wretched Atahualpa a promise to fill a room twenty-two feet by seventeen to the height of nine feet with gold, his place in history was assured. The swineherd had become immortal.

Strange is it that the name of Francisco Pizarro should be a household word while that of his brother Gonzalo is but little known and seldom repeated. Yet there are few episodes in the history of Spanish colonization more striking than the story of Gonzalo Pizarro’s march across the Andes and the discovery of the river Amazon. It is a tale of horror and suffering to which only the pen of a Defoe could do justice. Gonzalo not only survived the fearful journey, but had strength enough left to head a party for revolt against the viceroy, Blasco Nuñez, and the execution of the Ordinances. Like a true Pizarro, this conqueror died a violent death. He was beheaded; it seemed



## PHILIP THE SECOND

the only fitting way for one of that family to take his departure from life. The Pizarros used to behead their victims and then show themselves conspicuously at the funeral. When it came their turn to die, they were treated with scantier courtesy.

*Philip the Second* was Prescott's most ambitious work. Though but a fragment, the fragment is of noble dimensions, being longer by many pages than the *Ferdinand and Isabella*. The narrative is extraordinarily vivid. Few pages can match for interest those in which are described Philip's coming to Flanders and his assumption of power at the hands of his father Charles the Fifth. Here are exhibited at their best the much-praised qualities of Prescott's style. His prose grew better as he grew older.

The characters stand out like the figures of a play: the great princes, Charles the Fifth, Philip, Mary of England, and Elizabeth; the great warriors and statesmen, Guise, Montmorency, Alva, Egmont, and William of Orange; noble ladies like Margaret of Parma and the beautiful Elizabeth of France. The events were of high and tragic importance, for during this reign was to be settled the great question of freedom of thought and the right to worship God as the conscience and the reason dictated. The very contrasts of costume came to the aid of the historian in dealing with this romantic age. It would seem as if the writer must be picturesque in spite of himself.

## WILLIAM HICKLING PRESCOTT

The modern reader, whatever be his natural bent, finds himself impelled by the critical spirit of the times into distrusting all history which is not technical and hard to grasp. Prescott's books are incorrigibly 'literary' and therefore more or less under suspicion. Because they are attractive, it is taken for granted that they are unsound. Certain unhappy beings have gone so far as to slander them outright by calling them romances. But this is mere impatience with the kind of historical writing which Prescott's work exemplifies. He was a master of the art of narrative ; and history which stops with narrative is in the minds of severe students little better than the more vicious forms of literary idleness, such as poetry and fiction. Prescott gratifies his reader's curiosity about the past, but is not over solicitous to 'modify his 'view of the present and his forecast of the future.' In other words, he is well content to look at the surface of history, leaving it to others to look below the surface and philosophize on what they find there.

Nevertheless these brilliant volumes have a value which is something more than literary even if it be a good deal less than scientific. It is perhaps not extravagant to pronounce them an indispensable propædæutic to the study of Spanish-American history. They cannot be displaced by works which 'go much deeper into the subject.' Depth is not what is at all times most needed.

## *CONCLUSION*

We need stimulus, and encouragement to face the discipline awaiting us in deep books. He who, having read Prescott, was content to read no farther would be an odd sort of student ; but not so odd as he who labored under the impression that Prescott was a historian whom he could afford to do without.



VI

*Ralph Waldo Emerson*





# *Ralph Waldo Emerson*

## I

### HIS LIFE

**T**HE clerical profession was in a manner hereditary in the Emerson race. With a single exception there was a minister in each of six generations descending from Thomas Emerson of Ipswich, Massachusetts. For this one lapse compensation was made; another generation furnished the colony with three ministers.

For nearly a century and a half the history of the family has centred in Concord, Massachusetts. The house known as the 'Old Manse' was built in 1765 by William Emerson, the young minister of the First Church. Gentle in spirit, he was an ardent patriot and in Revolutionary times won the name

**G. W. Cooke:** *Ralph Waldo Emerson, his Life, Writings, and Philosophy*, fifth edition, 1882.

**O. W. Holmes:** *Ralph Waldo Emerson*, 'American Men of Letters,' 1885.

**J. E. Cabot:** *A Memoir of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, third edition, 1888.

**Richard Garnett:** *Life of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, 'Great Writers,' 1888.

**E. W. Emerson:** *Emerson in Concord*, 1889.

## RALPH WALDO EMERSON

of the 'fighting parson.' He came honestly by his militant temper, being a grandson of the famous Father Moody who distinguished himself at the siege of Louisburg as a preacher, fighter, and iconoclast.

Besides the gift of eloquence, William Emerson inherited from his father (the Reverend Joseph Emerson of Malden) a love of literature. This he apparently bequeathed to his son, William, who in turn transmitted it to his son, the author of *Conduct of Life* and *Representative Men*.

Ralph Waldo Emerson was born in Boston on May 25, 1803. His father, minister of the First Church of that city, was a man of vigorous intellect, fond of society, and, judging from one of his letters, endowed with a caustic wit. His mother, Ruth (Haskins) Emerson, was distinguished for her high-bred manners and tender thoughtfulness.

Severity on the part of parents was thought good for boys in that day. Ralph never forgot how his father 'twice or thrice put me in mortal terror 'by forcing me into the salt water, off some wharf 'or bathing-house; and I still recall the fright with 'which, after some of these salt experiences, I 'heard his voice one day (as Adam that of the 'Lord God in the garden) summoning me to a new 'bath, and I vainly endeavoring to hide myself.'

Left a widow in 1811, with five boys to educate, Mrs. Emerson was forced to heroic exertions. Her sacrifices made a deep impress on the mind of the most famous of those boys.

## EMERSON'S LIFE

From the Boston Latin School, Emerson went to Harvard College and was graduated in 1821 'with ambitions to be a professor of rhetoric and 'elocution.' After a period of school-teaching, a profession towards which his attitude was unequivocal ('Better saw wood, better sow hemp, better 'hang with it after it is sown, than sow the seeds 'of instruction'), he began his theological studies at Harvard and in due time was 'approbated to 'preach.' Ill health drove him South for a winter (1826-27), where he saw novel sights, and made the acquaintance of Achille Murat, son of the quondam King of Naples. Emerson had Murat for a fellow traveller from St. Augustine to Charleston: 'I blessed my stars for my fine companion, 'and we talked incessantly.'

On March 11, 1829, Emerson was ordained as colleague of Henry Ware in the Second Church of Boston and a little later 'became the sole incumbent.' He resigned this advantageous post of labor (September, 1832) because of doubts about the rite of the Lord's Supper and the offering of public prayer. To many observers his career seemed wilfully spoiled by himself.

With impaired health and in despondency and grief (he had but recently lost his young wife)<sup>1</sup> Emerson tried the effect of a year abroad. He

<sup>1</sup> Ellen (Tucker) Emerson was but twenty years of age at the time of her death. Emerson first saw her in December, 1827. They were married about two years later.

## RALPH WALDO EMERSON

sailed from Boston and arrived at Malta on February 2, 1833. Thence he proceeded to Syracuse, Taormina, Messina, Palermo, and Naples. After visiting the other chief cities of Italy, he journeyed to Paris, which he admired none the less because he felt out of place there; 'Pray what brought you 'here, grave Sir?' the moving Boulevard seemed to say. But he had the opportunity of hearing Jouffroy at the Sorbonne, and of paying his respects to Lafayette. In London he saw Coleridge. At Edinburgh he learned Carlyle's whereabouts, visited him, and found him, 'good and wise and pleasant.' He was unfortunate in his trip to the Highlands ('the scenery of a shower-bath must be always much 'the same'). He called on Wordsworth at Rydal Mount. In early October he was back at home.

The future was uncertain. Emerson was reluctant to give up the ministry, and preached from time to time as the chance presented itself. For some weeks he supplied Orville Dewey's church in New Bedford, but when it was intimated that on Dewey's resignation he might be invited to succeed him, Emerson made the impossible conditions that he should neither administer the Communion, nor offer prayer 'unless he felt moved to 'do so.' He supplied the pulpit of the Unitarian church in Concord during three months of the pastor's illness and for three years preached to the little congregation in East Lexington.

Having cut himself off from the only 'regular'

## EMERSON'S LIFE

mode of life that seemed open to him, Emerson took up the irregular vocation of lecturer. During the winter following his return from Europe, he had lectured before the Boston Society of Natural History. Beginning in January, 1835, he gave a course on 'Biography' consisting of six lectures: 'Tests of Great Men,' 'Michelangelo,' 'Luther,' 'Milton,' 'Fox,' and 'Burke.' During succeeding winters he gave ten lectures on 'English Literature' (1835-36), twelve lectures on 'The Philosophy of History' (1836-37), ten lectures on 'Human Culture' (1837-38), ten lectures on 'Human Life' (1838-39), ten lectures on 'The Present Age' (1839-40). He was now fairly engaged in his new calling.

Meantime he had fixed on Concord for his permanent home, bought a house there, married Miss Lydia Jackson of Plymouth, and begun that career of which one of his biographers has humorously complained, 'a life devoid of incident, of nearly 'untroubled happiness, and of absolute conformity 'to the moral law.'

In 1836 there was published anonymously a little volume entitled *Nature*. It was Emerson's first book. His influence as a man of letters begins at this point. The succeeding volumes consisted in part of lectures which, having stood the test of public delivery, were now recast in essay form. Not every essay, however, had its first presentation as spoken discourse.



## RALPH WALDO EMERSON

On formal public occasions Emerson was often invited to give the address. There was authority in his utterances. That he was not unlikely to say something revolutionary seemed to make it the more important that he should be heard often. He gave the Historical Address at Concord at the Second Centennial Anniversary, the Phi Beta Kappa Oration at Harvard on 'The American Scholar' (August, 1837), and the Address before the Senior Class in Divinity College (July 15, 1838), which brought down on him the wrath of Andrews Norton and a shower of remonstrances from Unitarian ministers who, however, loved him too much to be angry with him.

At the time of the Divinity Hall Address the so-called Transcendental movement was in full progress. The movement grew in part out of informal meetings held by a group of liberal thinkers with a view to protesting against the unsatisfactory state of current opinion in theology and philosophy, and looking for something broader and deeper.<sup>1</sup>

Transcendentalism was an intellectual ferment. Having a philosophical and religious significance, it was also notable for its effect on social, educational, and literary matters. Emerson defined it as faith in intuitions. It has been called an 'outburst of Romanticism on Puritan ground.' Certain historians connect it with German tran-

<sup>1</sup> Cabot: *Emerson*, i, 244.



## EMERSON'S LIFE

scendental philosophy. That it was indigenous to New England appears to be the sounder view. According to a high authority,<sup>1</sup> 'Emerson's transcendentalism was native to his mind. . . . It 'had been in the life and thought of his family for 'generations.' He was certainly regarded as the heresiarch.

Like most complex movements Transcendentalism had a grotesque side. The enthusiasts, in their anxiety to be emancipated from old formulas, fell victims to 'the vice of the age, — the propensity to exaggerate the importance of visible 'and tangible facts.' Emerson laughs at them a little: 'They promise the establishment of the 'kingdom of heaven and end with champing unleavened bread or dedicating themselves to the 'nourishment of a beard.'

The movement had an 'organ,' a quarterly magazine called 'The Dial,' the first number of which appeared in July, 1840. George Ripley was the business manager, Margaret Fuller the editor. It came under Emerson's care two years later, and in 1844 was abandoned. An audience large enough to support the organ could not be found.

Transcendentalism coincided chronologically with several plans for bettering the condition of the world. 'We are a little wild here with num-

<sup>1</sup> G. W. Cooke : *An Historical and Biographical Introduction to accompany THE DIAL as reprinted in numbers for The Rowfant Club* [Cleveland], 1902.

## RALPH WALDO EMERSON

‘berless projects of social reform. Not a reading man but has his draft of a new community in his waistcoat pocket. I am gently mad myself.’<sup>1</sup>

Emerson was sympathetic with the community experiments at ‘Brook Farm’ and ‘Fruitlands,’ but not to the extent of joining them. He approved every wild action of the experimenters, nevertheless he had a work of his own.

The work consisted in bringing his thought to his public by means of lectures. He was not overfond of the medium of communication. ‘Are not lectures a kind of Peter Parley’s story of ‘Uncle Plato, and a puppet show of the Eleusinian ‘mysteries?’ he asks. It is not recorded what he thought of that kind of lecturing which may best be described in Byron’s phrase — ‘to giggle ‘and make giggle.’ He frankly (but unenviously) admired the speaker who could produce instantaneous effects, moving the audience to laughter or tears. His own gifts were of another sort. When ‘the stout Illinoisian’ after a short trial walked out of the hall Emerson’s sympathies were with him: ‘Shakespeare, or Franklin, or Esop, coming to ‘Illinois, would say, I must give my wisdom a ‘comic form, . . .’

Urged thereto by his generous friend Alexander Ireland of the Manchester ‘Examiner,’ who took on himself all the business responsibilities, Emerson (in 1847) made a lecturing trip to England.

<sup>1</sup> Emerson to Carlyle, Oct. 30, 1840.

## EMERSON'S LIFE

He spoke in Manchester, Edinburgh, London, and elsewhere. The lectures were 'attacked by the 'clergymen,' and the attacks met with 'pale though 'brave defences' by Emerson's friends. After a few weeks in Paris, then in the throes of the revolution, the lecturer returned by way of England to America.

The crisis in the anti-slavery conflict was approaching. Emerson, in spite of his philosophical attitude towards reformers, became more and more identified with the Abolitionists. During a political speech at Cambridge he was repeatedly hissed by students. According to an eye-witness, he 'seemed absolutely to enjoy it.' As late as 1861 he was received with marked hostility by the audience which gathered at the annual meeting of the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society. 'The Mob 'roared whenever I attempted to speak, and after 'several beginnings I withdrew.' The breaking out of the war in a way relieved him. Now people knew where they stood.

His chief source of income was cut off for a time. The public was not in the mood for lectures such as his. Later he found it possible to resume his courses, and he continued to lecture effectively until within a few years of his death.

Emerson's principal books are: *Nature*, 1836; *Essays*, 1841; *Essays*, 'second series,' 1844; *Poems*, 1847; *Miscellanies*, 1849 (lectures and addresses, together with a reprint of *Nature*); *Representative*

## RALPH WALDO EMERSON

*Men*, 1850; *English Traits*, 1856; *Conduct of Life*, 1860; *May-Day and Other Pieces*, 1867; *Society and Solitude*, 1870; *Letters and Social Aims*, 1876; *Lectures and Biographical Sketches*, 1884; and *Natural History of Intellect*, 1893. He edited a number of Carlyle's books, contributed several chapters to the *Memoirs of Margaret Fuller Ossoli* and compiled a poetic anthology, *Parnassus*, 1875. *The Correspondence of Thomas Carlyle and Ralph Waldo Emerson* (edited by C. E. Norton), 1883, contains two hundred of Emerson's letters.

In 1863 Emerson was one of the 'visitors' to the Military Academy at West Point. In 1866 he was Phi Beta Kappa orator at Harvard, and the following year received from his college the degree of LL. D.

From 1867 to 1879 he was an overseer of Harvard. In 1870, before a little audience of students from the advanced classes, he gave a course on the 'Natural History of Intellect,' the subject in the handling of which he had hoped to write his master work. One of the surprises of his later life was his nomination for the office of Lord Rector of Glasgow University by the independent party (1874). There were two other candidates. Emerson polled five hundred votes. Disraeli was victor with seven hundred votes.

Emerson's memory failed gradually, but the defect was not much noticed until after the shock consequent on the burning of his house (1872).

## *HIS CHARACTER*

A trip to Egypt did much to restore his health and he never lost the 'royal trait of cheerfulness.' He died, after a brief illness, on April 27, 1882.

### II

#### EMERSON'S CHARACTER

THE praise which Emerson gives to character at the expense of luxurious surroundings was sincere. His own tastes were very simple. 'Can anything be so elegant as to have few wants and to serve them one's self, so as to have something left to give, instead of being always prompt to grab?' Acknowledging himself enmeshed in the conventionalities of 'civilized' life and no more responsible than his fellow victims, he nevertheless did what he could to follow out his theory. He would at least not be one of the infirm people of society, who, if they miss any one of their comforts, 'represent themselves as the most wronged and most wretched persons on earth.' Emerson did not live in the woods on twenty-seven cents a week, but he had no objection to a friend's living that way if the friend found it profitable. For himself he would not be 'absurd and pedantic in reform.'

No characteristic is more marked than his spirit of tolerance. It was not of a smooth, purring sort, growing out of eagerness to please or unwill-



## RALPH WALDO EMERSON

ingness to offend, but rather an aggressive tolerance. Emerson would not merely grant to every man 'the allowance he takes,' but would even force him to take it. He was patient with the most obnoxious of reformers. And he could be tolerant with those who could tolerate nothing.

With pronounced and original views he had little solicitude to impose his views on others. He was without egotism. To state the truth as he apprehended it and to let the world come to his ideas if the world could and would, contented him. But he had no quarrel with the order of things. His good humor and smiling patience are manifest in everything he has written.

Emerson held firmly to the doctrine of the brotherhood of man, yet with no touch of the unctuous fraternizer. He had the rebuffs that all must encounter who try to break down the partition wall between classes. In an attempt to solve, according to the Golden Rule, the problem of a servant's status in the household, he was thoroughly beaten and laughingly acknowledged it. He did his share, but the servant refused to fraternize.

He was a good citizen, an excellent neighbor, prompt in the acknowledgment of all homely duties. His was a large-souled, benignant, and gracious nature. There was something healing in his mere presence, though no word was spoken.



## EMERSON THE WRITER

### III

#### THE WRITER

EMERSON gave sound advice on the art of writing, like a professor of rhetoric. He commended the sentences that would stand the test of the voice. This is applying physiology to literature. He laughed at the habit of exaggeration, though he also said, 'The superlative is as good as the 'positive if it be alive.' His rules are excellent, and if followed must give distinction to whatever page of writing they are applied. But while they go no deeper than other suggestions, they point out the obvious characteristics of his style.

For example, Emerson thought clarity all-important. He aimed at it, and attained it. He believed in the use of the right word, and was dissatisfied unless it could be found. The right word is always illuminating, and as a result Emerson's English is full of surprises. Even when the term employed shocks by its unexpectedness, we presently feel that after all the choice was not grotesque. In practice Emerson was no spendthrift of words, that currency which loses weight and value in the ratio of one's prodigality, but delighted in economy. No doubt his style is aphoristic — that is a natural result of writing aphorisms. But if no less aphoristic, it is far more logical than is

## RALPH WALDO EMERSON

commonly reported. The want of sequence in Emerson's work has been exaggerated, often to the point of absurdity.

There are writers who have two distinct literary styles, as they have two faces, one to be photographed in, and one for natural wear. Emerson had one style, which was dual-toned, each tone taking the color of his prevailing thought, and each shading imperceptibly into the other. A dozen pages picked at random from his best essays will hardly fail to show how sublimated his diction could be at times. Then does it come near to the line dividing poetry from prose, from which it presently falls away to the level of everyday need. Poetic as Emerson's diction frequently is, it is always controlled. On the other hand, when it sinks to plain prose it never loses the air of distinction and breeding.

### IV

#### NATURE, ADDRESSES, AND LECTURES

IN the introduction of his first book, *Nature*, Emerson announces his favorite doctrine, the necessity of seeing the world through our own eyes, of being original, not imitative. He then proceeds with his interpretation. Nature not only exalts man, giving him a pleasure so tonic that it

## NATURE

admonishes to temperance, but also renders him certain services. They may be classified under Commodity, Beauty, Language, and Discipline. The first, albeit the lowest, is perfect in its kind; men everywhere comprehend the 'steady and 'prodigal provision' that has been made for their comfort. Beauty is the second, and meets a nobler want. 'Nature satisfies by its loveliness,' and 'without any mixture of corporeal benefit.' 'Give 'me health and a day, and I will make the pomp 'of emperors ridiculous.' This is not enough, there must be a spiritual element. Such element is found in the will and virtue of man. An act of truth or heroism 'seems at once to draw to 'itself the sky as its temple.' Beauty in Nature also becomes an object of the intellect. It reforms itself in the mind, leads to a new creation, and hence Art.

Nature is the source of language, words being the signs of natural facts. But 'every natural fact 'is a symbol of some spiritual fact.' In brief, 'the 'world is emblematic.' Nature is a discipline of the understanding, devoting herself to forming the common-sense. Nature is the discipline of the will, after which she becomes the ally of Religion. In short, so great is the part played by Nature in disciplining man that the 'noble doubt' perpetually arises 'whether the end be not the Final Cause 'of the Universe; and whether nature outwardly 'exists.'

## RALPH WALDO EMERSON

What then? It makes no difference 'whether 'Orion is up there in heaven or some god paints 'the image in the firmament of the soul.' Culture has the uniform effect of leading us to regard nature as a phenomenon, not a substance. Nature herself gives us the hint of Idealism. The poet teaches the same lesson. The philosopher seeking, not Beauty, but Truth, dissolves the 'solid seeming block of matter' by a thought. Intellectual science begets 'invariably a doubt of the existence 'of matter.' Ethics and religion have the same effect of degrading 'nature and suggesting its dependence on spirit.'

Back of all nature, then, is spirit. 'The world 'proceeds from the same spirit as the body of man. 'It is a remoter and inferior incarnation of God.' At present man has not come into his whole kingdom. He depends on his understanding alone. Let him apply all his powers, the reason as well as the understanding.

Brief as it is, this little book shows to perfection the richness of Emerson's thought, his skill in the apothegm, his economy of phrase, the poetic cast of his mind, and the beauty of his diction.

Nine addresses and lectures are printed along with *Nature* in the definitive edition of Emerson's writings. The first is the Phi Beta Kappa Oration, 'The American Scholar,' in which Emerson sounds with resonant tone that note of independence so marked in all his teaching. It was time,

## THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR

he thought, for the 'sluggard intellect' of America to 'look from under its iron lids' and prove itself equal to something more than 'exertions of mechanical skill.' We have been too long the bond slave of Europe.

True emancipation consists in freedom from the idea that only a few gifted ones of the earth are privileged to learn truth at first hand. Let us not be cowed by great men.

Emerson notes three influences acting upon the scholar. First, nature, always with us and taking the impress of our minds. Second, books, which, noble as they are in theory, have their danger: 'I had better never see a book than be warped by its attraction clean out of my own orbit.' Third, life, everything which is the opposite of mere thinking. 'If it were only for a vocabulary the scholar would be covetous of action. Life is our dictionary.'

Above all, he praises the obscure scholar who without hope of visible reward, reckoning at true value the seesaw of public whim and fancy, patient of neglect, patient of reproach, 'is happy if he can satisfy himself alone that this day he has seen something truly.'

'The Divinity Address,' as it is called, was thought in its day nothing short of outrageous radicalism. The now well-known Emersonian plea for a noble individuality is made in terms the most inspiring. He bewails the helplessness of mankind.



## RALPH WALDO EMERSON

‘All men go in flocks to this saint or that poet, ‘avoiding the God who seeth in secret.’ Emerson would drive out the spirit which prompts a man to content himself with being ‘an easy secondary ‘to some Christian scheme, or sectarian connection, ‘or some eminent man.’ He would have men follow no one leader, however distinguished or gifted, but seek truth at first hand, know God face to face. And while he grants that nothing is of value in comparison with the soul of a good and great man, even a great man becomes a source of danger if we propose to rest in the shadow of his achievement rather than develop our own gift.

‘The Method of Nature’ is a rhapsody in praise of the spontaneous and unreasoning as over against the logical and definite. Nature looks to great results, not to little ones, to the type rather than the individual.

In ‘Man the Reformer’ Emerson preaches another favorite doctrine, the necessity of manual work. There is nothing fanciful in his view. He did not set himself against division of labor. He did not insist that every man should be a farmer ‘any ‘more than that every man should be a lexicographer.’ His ‘doctrine of the Farm’ is that ‘every man ought to stand in primary relations ‘with the work of the world.’

This address should be read in connection with the one on ‘The Times,’ which supplements it. The ideal reformer is not he who has some cause



## THE TRANSCENDENTALIST

at heart in comparison with which all other causes are naught. The reformer is the 'Re-maker of what man has made; a renouncer of lies, a restorer of truth and good, imitating that great Nature which embosoms us all, and which sleeps no moment on an old past.'

A reading of this address ought to be followed by a reading of the one entitled 'The Conservative.' As he had advised reformers of the danger to which they were exposed, he now warns conservatives not to forget that they are the retrograde party. By their theory of life sickness is a necessity and the social frame a hospital. Yet in a planet 'peopled with conservatives one Reformer may yet be born.'

In the lecture on 'The Transcendentalist' Emerson comes to a tempered defence of his own. He defines the new movement; it is merely Idealism as it shows itself in 1840 — an old thing under a new name. He is very patient with the Transcendentalists, whose chief idiosyncrasy is that they have 'struck work.' 'Now every one must do after his kind, be he asp or angel, and these must.' American literature and spiritual history will profit by the turmoil. This heresy will leave its mark, as any one will admit who knows 'these seething brains, these admirable radicals, these talkers who talk the sun and moon away.'

## RALPH WALDO EMERSON

### V

#### *THE ESSAYS, REPRESENTATIVE MEN, ENGLISH TRAITS, CONDUCT OF LIFE*

WHEN the *Essays* appeared, Emerson found a larger audience. He now spoke through the medium of a recognized literary form. If all readers do not read essays, they at least know what they are and stand in no fear of them. Some buyers may have been tempted by the table of contents. Titles such as 'Self-Reliance,' 'Compensation,' 'Friendship,' 'Heroism,' had an encouraging sound and promised useful advice.

In the essay on 'History,' Emerson reaffirms the doctrine of the unity of human nature. There is 'one mind,' history is its record. What we possess in common with the men of the past enables us to comprehend and interpret the actions of the men of the past. The facts must square with our own experience.

The theme is continued in 'Self-Reliance.' As there is one mind common to all men, and as what belongs to greatness of the Past belongs also to us, it is suicide to descend to imitation. 'Speak 'your latent conviction and it shall become the 'universal sense.' The whole essay is a glowing exhortation to men to live largely and stand on their own feet, facing the world with the noncha-

## THE ESSAYS

lance begotten of health, good humor, and the sense of possession.

In 'Compensation' the essayist notes those inexorable forces by which a balance is kept in the world, the laws by virtue of which 'things refuse 'to be mismanaged long.' In 'Spiritual Laws' he shows the importance of living the life of nature. Let no man import into his mind 'difficulties 'which are none of his.' The essay on 'Love' is a prose poem in honor of that passion which 'makes the clown gentle, and gives the coward 'heart.' Following it is the essay on 'Friendship' with its austere definitions. 'I do not wish to treat 'friendships daintily, but with roughest courage.' 'Friendship implies sincerity, and sincerity is the 'luxury allowed, like diadems and authority, only 'to the highest rank.'

Emerson writes on 'Prudence' in order to balance those fine lyric words of Love and Friendship with words of coarser sound. Prudence considered in itself is naught; but recognized as one of the conditions of existence, it deserves our utmost attention. It keeps a man from standing in false and bitter relations to other men. Emerson had no patience with people who, because they have genius or beauty, expect an exception of the laws of Nature to be made in their case. Notwithstanding their gifts, they must toe the mark.

'Heroism,' the eighth essay in this volume, contains a definition of the hero which does not

## RALPH WALDO EMERSON

coincide with the popular conception. We are so accustomed to seeing our heroes crowned with wreaths and overwhelmed with lecture engagements the day following the act of valor that we are surprised to read : ' Heroism works in contradiction to the voice of mankind.' Emerson gives a new turn to the old phrase ' the heroic in every-day ' life.' Life, he says, has its ' ragged and dangerous ' front.' It is full of evils against which the man must be armed. ' Let him hear in season that he ' is born into a state of war.' To this ' militant ' attitude of the soul ' Emerson gave the name of heroism. In its rudest form it is ' contempt for ' safety and ease.'

To some readers the essay on ' The Over-Soul ' is at once the clearest and the most darkened, the plainest and the most enigmatic of the essays in this book. But there is no misapprehending the value of this effort to put, not in rigid scientific terms, but in glowing and lofty imagery, the dependence of man on the Infinite, the marvel of that Immensity which is the background of our being. ' From within or from behind, a light ' shines through us upon things, and makes us ' aware that we are nothing, but the light is all.' It is the universal mind by which all being is enveloped and interpenetrated.

The essay on ' Circles ' contains this thought : Outside every circle another may be drawn. Opinion seeks to crystallize at a certain limit, to

## THE ESSAYS

insist that there is nothing beyond. The soul bursts these barriers to set new limits, which in turn are good only for a time. Man must therefore keep himself always open to the conception of a larger circle. Let him 'prefer truth to his past apprehension of truth.'

How to seek truth is the subject of the next essay, 'Intellect,' a tribute to the spontaneous action of the mind. We do not control our thoughts but are controlled by them. All we can do is to clear away obstructions and 'suffer the intellect to see.' Pursue truth and it avoids you. Relax the energy of your pursuit and it comes to you; yet the pursuit was as necessary as the subsequent relaxation.

In the final essay, on 'Art,' the large, simple, and homely elements are praised, the qualities which appeal to universal human nature. In the paintings of the Old World one thinks to be astonished by something new and strange, and he is struck by the familiar look. He is reminded of what he had always known.

The second series of *Essays* treats of 'The Poet,' 'Experience,' 'Character,' 'Manners,' 'Gifts,' 'Nature,' 'Politics,' of 'Nominalist and Realist;' there is also a lecture on 'New England Reformers.' Emerson notes the shallow nature of a theory of poetry busied only with externals. Neither is that poetry which is written 'at a safe distance from our own experience.' The poet is



RALPH WALDO EMERSON

representative. 'He stands among common men  
'for the complete man, and appries us not of his  
'wealth but of the commonwealth.'

'Experience' is in praise of a mode of life which  
consists in living without making a fuss about it,  
filling the time, taking hold where one can and  
exhausting the possibilities. Only fanatics say it  
is not worth while. 'Let us be poised, and wise,  
'and our own, to-day. Let us treat the men and  
'women well ; treat them as if they were real ; per-  
'haps they are.'

'Character' and 'Manners' are related studies.  
There is a moral order in the world. Nothing can  
withstand it. 'Character is this moral order seen  
'through the medium of an individual nature.'  
Society has raised certain artificial distinctions.  
But they must be recognized. Society is real, and  
grows out of a genuine need. 'The painted phan-  
'tasm Fashion casts a species of derision on what  
'we say. But I will neither be driven from some  
'allowance to Fashion as a symbolic institution,  
'nor from the belief that love is the basis of  
'courtesy.'

'Gifts' is a fine bit of paradox. 'The gift, to  
'be true, must be the flowing of the giver unto  
'me, correspondent to my flowing unto him.  
'When the waters are at level, then my goods pass  
'to him, and his to me.' To give useful things  
denies the relation. Hence the fitness of beautiful  
things.



## REPRESENTATIVE MEN

There is bold imagery in the essay on 'Nature.' 'Plants are the young of the world, but they grope ever upward toward consciousness; the trees are imperfect men, and seem to bemoan their imprisonment, rooted to the ground. The animal is the novice and probationer of a more advanced order. The men though young, having tasted the first drop from the cup of thought, are already dissipated: the maples and ferns are still uncorrupt; yet no doubt when they come to consciousness they too will curse and swear.' Thus does Emerson describe that glimpse he had of a 'system in transition.'

A healthy optimism pervades the essay on 'Politics.' In spite of meddling and selfishness the foundations of the State are very secure. 'Things have their laws, as well as men; and things refuse to be trifled with.' By a higher law property will be protected. The same necessity secures to each nation the form of governing best suited to it. Yet all forms are defective. Good men 'must not obey the laws too well.' Perfect government rests on character at last. There are dreamers who do not despair of seeing the State renovated 'on the principle of right and love.'

*Representative Men* consists of lectures on Plato, Swedenborg, Montaigne, Shakespeare, Napoleon, and Goethe, together with an introduction on the 'Uses of Great Men.'

Plato is the man who makes havoc with origi-

## RALPH WALDO EMERSON

nalities, the philosopher whose writings have been for twenty-two hundred years the Bible of the learned, but who has his defects. Intellectual in aim, and therefore literary, he attempts a system of the universe and fails to complete it or make it intelligible.

Swedenborg is the representative of mysticism, great with its power, weak with its defects.

Out of the eternal conflict between abstractionist and materialist arises another type of mind, one that laughs at both philosophies for being out of their depth and pushing too far. He is the sceptic, Montaigne, for example. The type was peculiarly grateful to Emerson, admiring as he did a man who talked with shrewdness, was not literary, who knew the world, used the positive degree, never shrieked, and had no wish to annihilate time and space.

Shakespeare meets our conception of the Poet, 'a heart in unison with his time and country,' whose production comes 'freighted with the 'weightiest convictions and pointed with the most 'determined aims which any man or class knows 'of in his times.' He demonstrated the possibility of translating things into song. The ear is ravished by the beauty of his lines, 'yet the sentence 'is so loaded with meaning and so linked with its 'foregoers and followers, that the logician is satisfied.' And he had the royal trait of cheerfulness.

In Napoleon we have 'the strong and ready

## ENGLISH TRAITS

‘actor’ who in the ‘universal imbecility, indecision, and indolence of men’ knows how to take occasion by the beard. His life is an answer to cowardly doubts. Emerson calls Napoleon ‘the agent or attorney of the middle class of modern society.’ It was he who showed what could be done by the use of common virtues. His experiment failed because he had a selfish and sensual aim. In the last analysis Napoleon was not a gentleman.

Goethe is the other phase of the genius of the age. There is a provision for the writer in the scheme of things. Nature insists on being reported. To Man the universe is something to be recorded. The instinct exists in different degrees. One has the power to ‘see connection where the multitude sees fragments.’ Lift this faculty to a high degree and you have the great German poet who well-nigh restored literature to its primal significance. ‘There must be a man behind the book.’ ‘The old Eternal Genius who built the world has confided himself more to this man than any other.’ Goethe is the type of culture. Here, too, is his defect. For his devotion is not to pure truth, but to truth for the sake of culture.

*Representative Men* was succeeded by *English Traits*, a volume in which Emerson taught his countrymen more about England than they had hitherto known or fancied. Histories, statistical reports, treatises on British art and British manufactures, are useful and sometimes dreary reading ;

## RALPH WALDO EMERSON

they give us facts heaped on facts. It is a relief to put them down and take up *English Traits* in order to learn what we have been reading about.

Through Emerson's eyes we can see this little island 'a prize for the best race,' its singular people, chained to their logic, willing 'to kiss the dust 'before a fact,' strong in their sense of brotherhood, yet fond each of his own way, incommunicable, 'in short every one of these islanders an 'island in himself.' They have a 'superfluity of 'self-regard' — which is a secret of their power; they are assertive, crotchety, wholly forgetful of 'a cardinal article in the bill of social rights,' that every man 'has a right to his own ears;' nevertheless Emerson concludes (and an Englishman would assure him no other conclusion was possible) they are the best stock in the world. Here is the typical islander as Emerson paints him. 'He is a churl with a soft place in his heart, whose 'speech is a brash of bitter waters, but who loves 'to help you at a pinch. He says no, and serves 'you, and your thanks disgust him.'

There are paragraphs and chapters on the Aristocracy, the Universities, Religion, Literature, and the Press, that is, the 'Times.' Every page glitters with wit. Every apothegm contains the full proportion of truth and untruth which sayings of that sort are wont to contain. Says Emerson: 'The gospel the Anglican church preaches is, "By taste are ye saved."' Yet the more one re-

## CONDUCT OF LIFE

flects on this monstrous statement, the more is he astonished at the amount of truth in it.

The volume entitled *Conduct of Life* has a fine rough vigor. Here are displayed to advantage Emerson's robust habit of mind, searching analysis, vivacity and picturesqueness of expression, epigrammatic skill, homely plain sense, and lofty idealism. The first essay, 'Fate,' is an energetic and striking performance. One needs the optimism of its last paragraphs to counteract the grim terror of the earlier ones. Seldom has the relentless ferocity of Circumstance, Fate, Environment, been set forth in terms equally emphatic. The companion essay, 'Power,' is a study of the influence of brute force (and its compensations) in life and history. Emerson shows the value of the 'bruiser' in politics, trade, and in society. This leads to the third subject, 'Wealth.' Money must be had if only to buy bread. Nature insults the man who will not work. 'She starves, taunts, 'and torments him, takes away warmth, laughter, 'sleep, friends and daylight, until he has fought 'his way to his own loaf.' But what men of sense want is power, mastery, not candy; they esteem wealth to be 'the assimilation of nature to themselves.'

To all this there must be a corrective; it is discussed in the essay on 'Culture.' Nature ruins a man to gain her ends, makes him strong in things she wants done, weak otherwise, and then robs him



## RALPH WALDO EMERSON

of his sense of proportion so that he becomes an egotist. Culture restores the balance. Culture rescues a man from himself, 'kills his exaggeration.' The simpler means to it are books, travel, society, solitude; and there are nobler ones, not the least of which is adversity. The discussion is continued in the practical essay on 'Behavior' and lifted to the highest plane in the essay on 'Worship.' The whole state of man is a state of culture, 'and its flowering and completion may be described as Religion or Worship.' For all its beauty this chapter will not please many people. They may take refuge in 'Considerations by the Way,' which shows the 'good of evil,' or in the fine essay on 'Beauty' or the ironical little closing piece called 'Illusions.'

### VI

### THE POEMS

MANY paragraphs in *Nature* and the *Essays* struggle in their prose environment as if seeking a higher medium of expression. Emerson's command of poetic materials was extraordinary, though it fails to justify the claims sometimes made for him. He could be wilfully careless in respect to technique. There are moments when no cacophonous combination terrifies him. Then will he say his say though the language creak.



## EMERSON THE POET

He had published freely in 'The Dial,' where he met his own little audience, but when the question arose of putting his verses in the pretentious form of a book Emerson hesitated. Only after much deliberation, continued through four years, did he come finally to a decision.

His capital theme is Nature, 'the inscrutable and mute.' 'Woodnotes,' 'Monadnock,' 'May-Day,' 'My Garden,' 'Sea-Shore,' 'Song of Nature,' 'Nature,' 'The Snow Storm,' 'Waldeinsamkeit,' 'Musketaquit,' 'The Adirondacs,' are varied renderings of the subject. Among the lines which haunt the memory, take for example this description of the sea:—

The opaline, the plentiful and strong,  
Yet beautiful as is the rose in June,  
Purger of earth, and medicine of men;  
Creating a sweet climate by my breath,  
Washing out harms and griefs from memory,  
And, in my mathematic ebb and flow,  
Giving a hint of that which changes not.

Splendid imagery and rich coloring mark the fine passages in 'May-Day' describing the advance of summer:—

As poured the flood of the ancient sea  
Spilling over mountain chains,  
Bending forests as bends the sedge,  
Faster flowing o'er the plains, —  
A world-wide wave with a foaming edge  
That rims the running silver sheet, —  
So pours the deluge of the heat  
Broad northward o'er the land,  
Painting artless paradises,  
Drugging herbs with Syrian spices,

## RALPH WALDO EMERSON

Fanning secret fires which glow  
In columbine and clover-blow,  
. . . . .

The million-handed sculptor moulds  
Quaintest bud and blossom folds,  
The million-handed painter pours  
Opal hues and purple dye;  
Azaleas flush the island floors,  
And the tints of heaven reply.

Leaving to one side the mere external shows of the world, and calling in science to aid imagination, the poet strikes out stanzas like these from the 'Song of Nature:' —

I wrote the past in characters  
Of rock and fire the scroll,  
The building in the coral sea,  
The planting of the coal.

And thefts from satellites and rings  
And broken stars I drew,  
And out of spent and aged things  
I formed the world anew;

What time the gods kept carnival,  
Tricked out in star and flower,  
And in cramp elf and saurian forms  
They swathed their too much power.

'Hamatreya,' the exquisite 'Rhodora,' and the musical allegory 'Two Rivers' are important as showing the part played by Nature in Emerson's verse.

Certain poems repeat (or anticipate) the ideas of the essays. 'Brahma,' for example, is an incomparable setting of the doctrine of the universal soul or ground of all things: —

## EMERSON THE POET

Far or forgot to me is near ;  
Shadow and sunlight are the same ;  
The vanished gods to me appear ;  
And one to me are shame and fame.

‘The Sphinx’ announces, in a sphinx-like manner it must be acknowledged, though with rare beauty in individual lines, the doctrine of man’s relation to all existences, comprehending one phase of which man has the key to the whole. ‘Uriel’ is a declaration of the poet’s faith in good out of evil. ‘The Problem’ teaches the imminence of the Infinite :—

The hand that rounded Peter’s dome  
And groined the aisles of Christian Rome  
Wrought in a sad sincerity ;  
Himself from God he could not free ;  
He builded better than he knew ;—  
The conscious stone to beauty grew.

Rich in thought and abounding in genuine poetic gold are ‘The World-Soul,’ ‘The Visit,’ ‘Destiny,’ ‘Days’ (Emerson’s perfect poem), ‘Forerunners,’ ‘Xenophanes,’ ‘The Day’s Ration,’ and the ‘Ode to Beauty.’

‘Merlin’ and ‘Saadi’ treat of the poet and his mission. The one is a protest against the tinkling rhyme, an art without substance ; the other exalts the calling of the bard, but warns him that while he has need of men and they of him, the true poet dwells alone. Together with these suggestive verses should be read the posthumous fragment originally intended for a masque.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> ‘The Poet,’ printed in the appendix of the definitive edition of Emerson’s *Poems*.

## RALPH WALDO EMERSON

Of his occasional and patriotic poems the 'Concord Hymn,' sung at the dedication of the battle monument in 1837, must be held an imperishable part of our young literature. The winged words of the first stanza are among the not-to-be-forgotten things, and there is rare beauty in the second stanza : —

The foe long since in silence slept ;  
Alike the conqueror silent sleeps ;  
And Time the ruined bridge has swept  
Down the dark stream which seaward creeps.

For the Concord celebration of 1857 Emerson wrote the 'Ode' beginning

O tenderly the haughty day  
Fills his blue urn with fire ;

and for the 'Jubilee Concert' in Music Hall, on the day Emancipation went into effect, the 'Boston Hymn,' with the bold stanzas : —

God said, I am tired of kings,  
I suffer them no more ;  
Up to my ear the morning brings  
The outrage of the poor.

Think ye I made this ball  
A field of havoc and war,  
Where tyrants great and tyrants small  
Might harry the weak and poor ?

The best of Emerson's patriotic poems is the 'Voluntaries,' containing the often quoted and perfect lines : —

So nigh is grandeur to our dust,  
So near is God to man,  
When Duty whispers low, *Thou must,*  
The youth replies, *I can.*

## EMERSON THE POET

The personal poems are 'Good-Bye,' 'Terminus,' 'In Memoriam,' 'Dirge,' and 'Threnody.' The last of the group is the poet's lament for his first-born, the 'hyacinthine boy' of five years, who died in 1842. It is hardly worth the while to compare these exquisite verses with some other poem born of intense sorrow with a view to determining whether they are greater, or less. Their wondrous beauty is as palpable as it is unressembling.

Comparisons little befit Emerson the poet. His muse was wayward. Extreme eulogists do him injury by applying to him standards that were none of his. They forget how he said of himself that he was 'not a poet, but a lover of 'poetry and poets, and merely serving as a writer, 'etc., in this empty America before the arrival of 'poets.' For the extravagancies of the extremists the tempered admirers find themselves regularly lectured, as if they were children who must have it explained to them that Emerson was not a Keats or a Shelley, or a Hugo.

Emerson as frequently gets less than he deserves as more. What niggardly praise is that from the pen of an eminent living English man of letters who can only suppose that Emerson 'knew what 'he was about when he wandered into the fairy-land of verse, and that in such moments *he found 'nothing better to his hand!*' But the 'Threnody,' 'Monadnock,' 'May-Day,' 'Voluntaries,' and

## RALPH WALDO EMERSON

‘The Problem,’ whatever else may be true of them, are not the work of a man who found nothing better to his hand.

### VII

#### LATEST BOOKS

FIVE volumes remain to be commented on. The first, *Society and Solitude* (so called after the initial paper), is a group of twelve essays entitled ‘Civilization,’ ‘Art,’ ‘Eloquence,’ ‘Domestic Life,’ ‘Farming,’ ‘Works and Days,’ ‘Books,’ ‘Clubs,’ ‘Courage,’ ‘Success,’ and ‘Old Age.’ They have mostly a practical bent. That on ‘Books’ doubtless gives an account of Emerson’s own reading, adequate as far as it expresses his literary preferences, inadequate respecting completeness. For example, Emerson must have read George Borrow, of an acquaintance with whom he repeatedly gives proof, but these lists contain no mention of *Lavengro* or *Romany Rye*. Here too will be found his famous heresy about the value of translations, but not so radically stated by Emerson as it is sometimes stated by those who propose to attack Emerson’s position.

*Letters and Social Aims* (a volume forced from him by the rumor that an English house proposed to reprint his early papers from ‘The Dial’) covers topics as diverse as, on the one hand, ‘Social Aims,’



## LATEST BOOKS

‘Quotation and Originality,’ ‘The Comic,’ and on the other, ‘Poetry and Imagination,’ ‘Inspiration,’ ‘Greatness,’ ‘Immortality.’ There are also essays on ‘Eloquence,’ ‘Resources,’ ‘Progress of Culture,’ and ‘Persian Poetry.’

*Lectures and Biographical Sketches* consists of nineteen pieces, among which will be found ‘Historic Notes of Life and Letters in New England,’ ‘The Superlative,’ and the brilliant sketches of Thoreau, of Ezra Ripley, and of Carlyle.

*Miscellanies* (not to be confounded with the volume of 1849 bearing the same title) contains a number of papers and addresses on political topics, and is indispensable to the student of Emerson’s life. Here will be found his speeches on John Brown, on the Fugitive Slave Law, on Emancipation in the West Indies, on American Civilization, on Lincoln, and that inspiring lecture, ‘The Fortune of the Republic.’

*Natural History of Intellect and Other Papers* is made up of lectures from the Harvard University course (1870–71) and earlier courses, and a sheaf of papers from ‘The Dial,’ mostly on ‘Modern Literature.’ He who deplores the curtness of the note on Tennyson in *English Traits* will be glad to seek comfort in this earlier tribute. Yet the comfort may prove to be less than he would like.

Emerson’s audience is large and varied. Let us consider a few among the varieties of those who

## RALPH WALDO EMERSON

are attracted by his genius and the charm of his personality.

To certain hardy investigators Emerson is not a mere man of letters whose thought, radiantly clothed, takes the philosophical form, he is a philosopher almost in the strict sense. They find a place for him in their classification. They know exactly what ideas, derived from what pundits, have come out with what new inflection in his writings. They have done for Emerson more than he could do, or perhaps cared to do, for himself; they have given him a system.

All this is important and valuable. No little praise is due to results worked out with so much courage and critical acumen. Whether the conclusions are quite true is another question.

Doubtless, too, there are readers who, taking their cue from the class just mentioned, find their self-love flattered as they turn the pages of the *Essays* and the *Conduct of Life*. Not only, in spite of dark sayings here and there, does 'philosophy' prove easier and more delightful than they were wont to think, but their estimate of their own mental powers is immensely enlarged.

There are the critics of letters whose function is interpretative, and whose influence is restraining. Solicitous to do their author justice, they are above all solicitous that injustice shall not be done him by overpraise. They bring proof that Emerson was not a precursor of Darwin, that he was infe-

## CONCLUSION

rior to Carlyle, that he was not a poet, that he was never a great and not always a good writer, that he was apt to impose on his reader as a new truth an old error in 'a novel and fascinating dress,' that he was even capable of writing words without ideas.

But the motives which draw and bind to him the great majority of Emerson's readers are connected with literature rather than philosophy or criticism. A prerogative of the man of letters is to be read both for what he says and for the way he says it. In the case of Emerson his thought may not be divided from the verbal setting. 'He can never get beyond the English language.' 'No merely French, or German, or Italian reader will have the least notion of the magic of his diction.'<sup>1</sup>

Perhaps in the long run they get the most out of Emerson who read him not for stimulus, for his militant optimism, for the shock his fine-phrased audacities give their humdrum opinions, for his uplifting idealism (all of which they are sure to get and profit by), but who read him for literary pleasure, for downright good-fellowship, and for the humor that is in him. That he attracts a large audience of this (seemingly) unimportant class is enough to show how little danger there is that Emerson will be handed over to the keeping of the merely erudite and bookish part of the public.

It is well to remember that he had no intention

<sup>1</sup> Richard Garnett.

## RALPH WALDO EMERSON

of being so disposed of. When he said, 'My own 'habitual view is to the well being of students or 'scholars,' he was careful immediately to explain that he used the word 'student' in no restricted sense. 'The class of scholars or students . . . is 'a class that comprises in some sort all mankind, 'comprises every man in the best hours of his life.' He pictures the newsboy entering a train filled with men going to business. The morning papers are bought, and 'instantly the entire rectangular assembly, fresh from their breakfast, are bending 'as one man to their second breakfast.' This was Emerson's student body, this was the audience he aimed to reach.

Did he reach this body? It is believed that he did, if not always directly, then vicariously. He was compelled as a matter of course to speak in his own way — the impossible thing for him was to do violence to his genius. Emerson invented the phrase, 'the man in the street.' Now it is notorious that the man in the street cares little about the 'over-soul.' The mere juxtaposition of the two expressions is comic. But Emerson did not talk of the over-soul all the time. He had a Franklin-like common-sense and a pithiness of speech which are captivating. Perhaps in magnifying his idealism we have neglected to do justice to his mundane philosophy.

VII

*Edgar Allan Poe*





# Edgar Allan Poe

## I

### HIS LIFE

POE was of Irish extraction. His great-grandfather, John Poe, came to America about 1745 and settled near Lancaster, Pennsylvania. John Poe's son David (known in the annals of Baltimore as 'old General Poe') rendered notable services to his country during the Revolution. Lafayette remembered him well and during a visit to Baltimore in 1824 asked to be taken to the place where Poe was buried. 'Ici repose un cœur noble,' said Lafayette as he knelt and kissed the old patriot's grave.

R. W. Griswold: 'Memoir of the Author' prefixed to the *Works of Edgar A. Poe*, vol. iii, 1850.

E. C. Stedman: *Edgar Allan Poe*, 1881.

J. H. Ingram: *Edgar Allan Poe, his Life, Letters, and Opinions*, 1880.

G. E. Woodberry: *Edgar Allan Poe*, 'American Men of Letters,' fourth edition, 1888.

J. A. Harrison: *Life and Letters of Edgar Allan Poe* [1902-03].

Émile Lauvrière: *Edgar Poe, sa Vie et son Œuvre, étude de psychologie pathologique*, 1904.

## EDGAR ALLAN POE

Of General Poe's six children, the eldest, David, was to have been bred to the law, but his tastes led him first to the amateur and then to the professional stage. He married a young English actress, Mrs. Elizabeth (Arnold) Hopkins. They had three children, William, Edgar, and Rosalie. Edgar (afterwards known as Edgar Allan) was born in Boston, Massachusetts, on January 19, 1809.

The young family suffered the petty miseries incident to the life of strolling players, and became at one time very poor. The circumstances of David Poe's death and the place of his burial are unknown. When Mrs. Poe died at Richmond, Virginia, in December, 1811, Edgar was taken by Mrs. John Allan, the wife of a highly respected merchant of that city, and was brought up as a child of the house.

The Allans were in England from 1815 to 1820. During this time Poe was placed at Manor House School, Stoke Newington. He afterwards attended the English and Classical School in Richmond and on February 14, 1826, matriculated at the University of Virginia. His connection with the University ceased in December of the same year. He left behind him a reputation for marked abilities, but he is said to have lost caste by his recklessness in card playing. Allan positively refused to pay the youth's gambling debts, which amounted to twenty-five hundred dollars.

## POE'S LIFE

Placed in Allan's counting-house, Poe was unhappy and rebellious, and finally disappeared. He declared in after years that he went abroad to offer his services to the Greeks. What he really did was to enlist in the United States army under the name of Edgar A. Perry. During the summer of 1827 he was with Battery H of the First Artillery at Fort Independence, Boston. In August of that year he published *Tamerlane and Other Poems, by a Bostonian*. The edition was small and the pamphlet has become one of the rarest of bibliographical curiosities.

Battery H was sent to Fort Moultrie, South Carolina, in October, 1827, and a year later to Fortress Monroe, Virginia. At some time during this period Poe must have made his whereabouts known to the Allans. Mrs. Allan, who was tenderly attached to Poe, may have succeeded in bringing about an understanding between the youth and his foster father. When she died (in February, 1829) Poe lost his best friend.

Allan, however, did what he could to forward the young man's newest ambition, which was to enter the Military Academy at West Point. He paid for a substitute in the army and wrote letters to men who were influential in such matters, with the result that Poe was enrolled at the Academy on July 1, 1830. He gave his age as nineteen years and five months. His prematurely old look led to the invention of the story that the appoint-

## EDGAR ALLAN POE

ment was really procured for Poe's son, but the son having died the father had taken his place.

While the question of the appointment was pending, Poe spent some time in Baltimore and there published his second volume of verse, *Al Aaraaf, Tamerlane, and Minor Poems* (1829).

The accounts of his life at the Academy are not so divergent as to be contradictory. One class-mate noted the youth's censorious manner: 'I never heard him speak in terms of praise of any English writer, living or dead.' Excelling in French and mathematics, Poe by intentional neglect of military duty brought about his own dismissal. He was court-martialled and left West Point on March 7, 1831. He had previously taken subscriptions among his friends for a new book of verse. It was published in New York (1831) under the title of *Poems*, 'second edition,' and was dedicated to 'the U. S. Corps of Cadets,' who are said to have been disappointed at finding in its pages none of the local squibs with which the author had been wont to amuse them.

Poe is next heard of in Baltimore, where he seems to have made his home with his father's sister, Mrs. Maria Clemm, a widow with one child, Virginia. In 1833 'The Saturday Visiter' of Baltimore offered two prizes — one hundred dollars for a story, fifty for a poem. Poe submitted a manuscript volume entitled 'Tales of the Folio Club,' and was given one award for his famous

## POE'S LIFE

‘MS. Found in a Bottle.’ Had not the conditions of the contest precluded giving both prizes to the same person, he would have received the other award for his poem ‘The Coliseum.’

Through John P. Kennedy, one of the judges in the contest, Poe came into relations with T. W. White, the proprietor of ‘The Southern Literary Messenger,’ published at Richmond. His contributions were heartily welcomed. White then invited Poe to become his editorial associate. The offer was accepted and Poe went to Richmond. Mrs. Clemm and Virginia followed, and in May, 1836, Poe was married to his cousin. A private marriage is said to have taken place at Baltimore the preceding September.

The arrangement entered into by White and Poe was most propitious. The proprietor of the ‘Messenger’ had obtained the services of a young man with a positive genius for the work in hand,—a young man who was able to contribute such tales as ‘Berenice,’ ‘Morella,’ ‘Hans Pfaall,’ ‘Metzengerstein,’ besides poems, miscellanies, and caustic book-criticisms. On the other hand, Poe had, if a small, at least a regular income. He could not buy luxury with a salary of five hundred and twenty dollars, but it was a beginning, and an increase was promised. Moreover, he was in the hands of a man who regarded him with affection no less than admiration. Unfortunately the arrangement was not to last. Poe had become the victim



## EDGAR ALLAN POE

of a hereditary vice.<sup>1</sup> Whether he drank much or little is of less consequence than the fact that after a period of indulgence he was wholly unfitted for work. Once when Poe was temporarily in Baltimore, White wrote him that if he returned to the office it must be with the understanding that all engagements were at an end the moment he 'got drunk.' Kennedy explained Poe's leaving the 'Messenger' thus: He was 'irregular, 'eccentric, and querulous, and soon gave up his 'place.'

From Richmond, Poe went to New York, attracted by some promise in connection with a magazine. He lived in Carmine Street, and Mrs. Clemm contributed to the family support by taking boarders. In July, 1838, was published *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*. A month later Poe removed to Philadelphia.

He contributed to annuals and magazines and had a hand in a piece of hack-work, *The Conchologist's First Book* (1839). This same year he became assistant editor of 'Burton's Gentleman's Magazine and American Monthly,' a periodical owned by the actor, William E. Burton, and held his position until June, 1840. The irregularity

<sup>1</sup> ' . . . There is one thing I am anxious to caution you against, & which has been a great enemy to our family, I hope, however, in yr case, it may prove unnecessary, "A too free use of the Bottle" . . . ' William Poe to E. A. Poe, 15th June, 1843. Harrison's *Poe*, vol. ii, p. 143.



and querulousness which Kennedy had remarked led to misunderstandings. How the two men differed in policy becomes plain from a letter to Poe in which Burton says: 'You must, my dear sir, get rid of your avowed ill feelings towards your brother authors.' There was a quarrel, and Poe, who had some command of the rhetoric of abuse, described Burton as 'a blackguard and a villain.'

The year 1840 was notable in the history of American letters, for then appeared the first collected edition of Poe's prose writings, *Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque*. The edition, of seven hundred and fifty copies, was in two volumes and contained twenty-five stories, among them 'Morella,' 'William Wilson,' 'The Fall of the House of Usher,' 'Ligeia,' 'Berenice,' and 'The Conversation of Eiros and Charmion.'

Poe, a born 'magazinish,' cherished the ambition of editing a periodical of his own in which, as he phrased it, he could 'kick up a dust.' He secured a partner and actually announced that 'The Penn Magazine' would begin publication on January 1, 1841. Compelled to postpone his project, he undertook the editorship of 'Graham's Magazine,' a new monthly formed by uniting the 'Gentleman's,' which Graham had bought, and 'The Casket.' From February, 1841, to June, 1842, Poe contributed to every number of the new magazine, printing, among other things, 'The Murders in the Rue Morgue,' 'The Mystery of Marie Rogêt,' and

## EDGAR ALLAN POE

‘The Masque of the Red Death.’ Griswold succeeded him in the editorial chair. Poe gave as a reason for resigning his place ‘disgust with the ‘namby-pamby character of the magazine.’ In the hope of bettering his fortune, he sought a place in the Philadelphia Custom House, but was unsuccessful.

Notwithstanding frequent set-backs, he had it in his power at any time to attract public notice. In 1843 he won a hundred-dollar prize for his story ‘The Gold-Bug,’ printed in the ‘Dollar Newspaper,’ and he lectured with success on ‘The Poets and Poetry of America.’ But the field was barren and Poe determined on going to New York. Within a week after his arrival in that city (April, 1844) he printed in ‘The Sun’ his famous ‘Balloon Hoax.’ In October he began work on ‘The Evening Mirror,’ Willis’s paper, and on January 29, 1845, ‘The Raven’ appeared in its columns and was the poetical sensation of the day. The next month he lectured on American Poetry in the library of the New York Historical Society. Dissatisfied with the ‘Mirror,’ he accepted a proposition from C. F. Briggs to become one of the editors of ‘The Broadway Journal.’ Later Poe became the sole editor, and for a brief time enjoyed the ambition of his life, the control of a paper of his own. He is said to have doubled the circulation in the four months during which he filled the editorial chair. Unfortunately he lacked capital

## POE'S LIFE

and could by no means secure it. 'The Broadway Journal' stopped publication.

While editing the 'Journal' Poe was invited to read an original poem before the Boston Lyceum. He gave a juvenile piece, and when criticised, defended himself with curious want of tact. That he might lose no opportunity to alienate his contemporaries, he began publishing in 'Godey's Lady's Book' a series of papers entitled 'The Literati,' in which he gave free rein to his propensity to 'kick up a dust.' The irony of his situation might well excite pity. He who most loathed a combination of literature and fashion plates was driven for support to the journals which made such a combination their chief feature.

At the close of 1845 was published *The Raven and Other Poems*, the first collected edition of Poe's verse. Occasionally the poet was seen at literary gatherings, where he left the most agreeable impression by his manner, appearance, and conversation. But his fortunes steadily declined, and in 1846, after he had moved to Fordham, a suburb of New York, he fell into desperate straits. His frail little wife, always an invalid, grew steadily worse. An appeal was made through the journals in behalf of the unfortunate family. Mrs. Poe died on January 30, 1847. Her husband's grief was so poignant that it is with amazement one reads of the strange affairs of the heart following this event.

Recovering from the severe illness which fol-

## EDGAR ALLAN POE

lowed his wife's death, Poe resumed work. He lectured and he wrote. *Eureka* was published early in 1847. The consuming desire to own and edit a magazine was no less consuming, and he made some progress towards founding 'The Stylus.'

The summer of 1849 Poe spent in Richmond and was received with cordiality. He proposed marriage to Mrs. Shelton of that city, a wealthy widow, somewhat older than himself, and was accepted. On the last of September he started for New York to get Mrs. Clemm and bring her to Richmond. He was found almost unconscious on October 3 at Baltimore, in a saloon used as a voting place, was taken to a hospital, and died at five o'clock on the morning of October 7, 1849.

## II

### POE'S CHARACTER

POE's wilfulness in marring his own fortunes bordered on fatuity. At an age when men give over youthful excesses merely because they are incongruous, he had not so much as begun to 'settle down.' The appropriate period for sowing wild oats is brief at best. Nothing justifies an undue prolongation. It were absurd to take the lofty tone with a man of genius because at the age of seventeen he carried to extreme the indulgences char-

## POE'S CHARACTER

acteristic of the youth of his time, or because at eighteen he ran away from a book-keeper's desk to join the army. Impulsiveness and vacillation are not wholly bad things at eighteen ; but at thirty they are ridiculous.

Poe's abuse of liquor and opium has long been well understood, and the question of his responsibility handed over to the decision of the medical faculty. If many of his troubles sprang from this abuse, many more arose out of his unwillingness to recognize the fact that he was a part of society, not an isolated and self-sufficient being. As a genius he was entitled to his prerogative. He was also a man among men and under the same obligations to continued fair dealing, courtesy, patience, and forbearance as were his fellows. In these matters he was notoriously deficient. No one could have been more eager for praise and sympathy than Poe. He asked for both and received in the measure of his asking. Men of influence helped him ungrudgingly. They lent him money, commended his work, defended him at first from the criticism of those who thought they had suffered at his hands ; but it was to no purpose. By his perversity and capriciousness (as also by an occasional display of that which in a less highly endowed man than he would have been called malevolence) Poe alienated those who were most inclined to befriend him. Nevertheless he wondered that friends fell away.



## EDGAR ALLAN POE

With a powerful mind, a towering imagination, a natural command of the technical part of literature, which he improved by tireless exercise, and with no little spontaneity of productive energy, Poe remained a boy in character, self-willed, spoiled, ungrateful, petulant. The sharper the lash of fortune's whip on his shoulders, the more rebellious he became.

The affair of the Boston Lyceum illustrates Poe's singular disregard of what is expected of men supposed to know the ways of the world. A Southern paper commenting on this affair said that Poe should not have gone to Boston. The implication was that as Poe had been attacking the New Englanders for years he could not expect fair treatment. Poe had indeed often attacked the 'Frogpondians,' as he enjoyed calling them, and they invited him to come and read an original poem on an occasion of some local importance. This may have been a mark of innocence on the part of the 'Frogpondians;' it can hardly be construed as indicative of narrowness or prejudice. Poe accepted their hospitality apparently in the spirit in which it was offered, read one of his old poems, and declared afterward that he wrote it before completing his tenth year, and that he considered it would answer sufficiently well for an audience of Transcendentalists: 'It was the best we had — for the price — and it *did* answer remarkably well.'



## POE'S CHARACTER

The episode is of no importance save as it illustrates Poe's attitude towards the game of life. Poe expected other men to play the game strictly according to the rules, for himself he would play the game in his own way. And he did. But he could not go on breaking the rules indefinitely. They who had his real interest at heart told him as much. Simms, the novelist, wrote Poe in July, 1846, that he deeply deplored his misfortunes — 'the more so as I see no process for your relief 'but such as must result from your own decision 'and resolve.' The letter should be read in its entirety. It does honor to the writer's manly nature, and it throws no little light on the enigmatic character of Poe.

### III

#### THE PROSE WRITER

POE's genius was essentially journalistic. In his prose writing he aimed at an immediate effect, and he knew exactly how to produce it. The journalist does not in general write with a view to the influence his paragraph will produce week after next. The paper will have disappeared week after next, if not day after to-morrow. Though his theme be the eternal verities, the journalist must write as if he had but the one chance to speak on

## EDGAR ALLAN POE

that subject. He will therefore be direct, positive, clear, seeking to persuade, convince, irritate, amuse.

The most obvious characteristics of Poe's style are found in his clarity, his vividness, his precision, in the dense shadows and the high lights, in the hundred unnamed but distinctly felt marks of the journalistic style. Whatever he proposes to do, that he does. There is no fumbling. Even his mysteries are as certain as the stage effects in a spectacular drama; they seem to come at the turning of an electric switch or the inserting of a blue glass before the lime light. In reality the process is much more complicated. Other magicians have essayed to produce like effects by turning the same switch, with disastrous result.

Poe was a diligent seeker after literary finish. He was painstaking, and would polish and retouch a paragraph when to the eye of a good judge there was nothing left to do by way of improvement. 'He seemed never to regard a story 'as finished.'<sup>1</sup>

He was over emphatic at times, and like De Quincey, many of whose irritating mannerisms he had caught, made a childish use of italics. But he had no need of these adventitious supports. It was enough for him to state a thing in his inimitable manner. While his vocabulary was for the most part simple, he was not without his verbal affectations. He loved words surcharged with

<sup>1</sup> G. E. Woodberry.

## THE PROSE WRITER

poetic suggestion. A lamp never hangs from the ceiling, it 'depends.' One of his favorite words is 'domain.' The black 'tarn' which mirrors the house of Usher he could have called by no other term. 'Lake,' or 'pond,' or 'pool' would not have done. The word must be remote, suggestive, mysterious.

His style often glows with prismatic colors, but the colors seem to be refracted from ice. There is no warmth, no sweetness, no lovable and human quality. All the pronounced characteristics of Poe's style are intensely and coldly intellectual. It is easier to admire his use of language than to like it.

### IV

## TALES OF THE GROTESQUE AND ARABESQUE

By virtue of his journalistic gift, Poe resembled the author of *Robinson Crusoe*. He could not, like Defoe, have become general literary purveyor to the people, but he was quite ready to profit by what was uppermost in the public mind. *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* is an illustration, as it is also a good example of Poe's art in its most mundane form. It recounts the adventures of a runaway lad at sea. Mutiny, drunkenness,

## EDGAR ALLAN POE

brawling, murder, shipwreck, cannibalism, madness, are the chief ingredients of the book. It is minute, circumstantial, prolix, matter of fact. The air of verisimilitude is increased by an alternation of episodes of thrilling interest with tedious accounts of how a cargo should be stowed, and the object and method of bringing a ship to. Only at rare intervals does Poe's peculiar genius flash out.

As the longest of his writings the *Narrative* has a peculiar value. By it we are able to get some notion of his power for 'sustained effort,' to use a phrase that always irritated him. That power was certainly not great; perhaps it was never fairly tested. *The Journal of Julius Rodman* is a second attempt at the same kind of fiction. Poe was less happy in descriptions of the prairie than of the sea; the interest of the *Journal* is feeble.

In these fictions the author holds fast to tangible things. Pym and Rodman might have had the adventures they recount. In another group of stories Poe leavens fact with imagination. Such are 'The Balloon Hoax,' 'The Unparalleled Adventure of one Hans Pfaall,' 'A Descent into the 'Maelström,' and the 'MS. Found in a Bottle.' Real or alleged science is compounded with the elements of wonder and mystery. And with these elements comes an increase of power.

Poe, who was never backward in giving himself the credit he thought his due, often failed to understand where his own most marvellous achieve-

## POE'S TALES

ments lay. In 'Hans Pfaall' he claimed originality in the use of scientific data. Had his stories only this to recommend them, they would long since have been forgotten. Nothing so quickly becomes old-fashioned as popular science. The display of knowledge about aerial navigation in 'Hans Pfaall' perhaps made a brave show in 1836, but it is childish now. A Hans Pfaall of the Twentieth Century would descend on Rotterdam in a dirigible balloon, and if questioned would be found to entertain enlightened views on storage batteries. Poe talked glibly about sines and co-sines and brought noisy charges of astronomical ignorance against his brother writers, but it was not in these things that his genius displayed itself, it was rather in the way this wonder-worker makes one aware of the illimitable stretches of space, the appalling vastness, the silence, the mystery, terror, and majesty of Nature. He is the clever craftsman in his account of how the Dutch bellows-mender started on his aerial travels. But when in two or three paragraphs Poe conveys a sense of height so terrific that the plain fireside reader, indisposed to balloon ascensions, grasps the arms of his chair and clings to the floor with the toes of his slippers lest he fall — then does he display a power with which popular science has nothing to do.

This is true of 'A Descent into the Maelström.' What scientific fact went into the composition of the piece appears to have been taken from the



*Encyclopædia Britannica*, but the valuable part, the sense of life and movement, the crash of the storm, the roar of the waves, the shriek of the vortex, like the cry of lost souls, all this is not to be found in encyclopædias. The story can be read any number of times and its magical power felt afresh each time. But the first reading cannot be described by so tame a phrase as a literary pleasure, it is an experience.

Another masterpiece is the 'MS. Found in a Bottle.' The din of the storm is not easily got out of one's ears. With the unnamed hero of the tale we 'stand aghast at the warring of wind and 'ocean' and are chilled by the 'stupendous ram-parts of ice, towering away into the desolate 'sky.'

In another group of stories, 'The Gold-Bug,' the gruesome 'Murders in the Rue Morgue,' 'The Mystery of Marie Rogêt,' and 'The Purloined Letter,' the author fabricates mysteries for the express purpose of unravelling them afterwards. Poe, who seldom attempts the creation of a character, actually created one in the person of his famous detective. Dupin is a living being in a world peopled for the most part with shadows.

Poe professed not to think much of his detective stories. The 'ratiocinative' tale is not a high order of literary achievement. Poe shares the honors accruing from the invention of such puzzles with Wilkie Collins, Gaboriau, and the 'great



## POE'S TALES

'Boisgobey,' and they in turn with the most sensational of sensation mongers.

'The Gold-Bug' afforded the author a vehicle for giving expression to his delight in cryptography, at the same time he availed himself of the perennial human interest in the prospect of unearthing buried treasure. 'The Mystery of Marie Rogêt' was based on a contemporary murder case. It contains a minimum of that in which Poe often revelled, namely physical horror, and a maximum of the ratiocinative element. 'The Purloined Letter' is in lighter vein, and illustrates the comedy side of Dupin's adventures. Chevalier and minister cross swords with admirable grace, but no blood is drawn.

The masterpiece of the group is 'The Murders 'in the Rue Morgue.' Genuinely original, blood-curdling, the story depends for its real force not on the ingenious unravelling of a frightful mystery, but on the sense of nameless horror which creeps over us as little by little the outré character of the tragedy is disclosed. We realize that in the dread event of being murdered one might have a choice as to how it was done. The predestined victim might even pray to die by the hands of a plain God-fearing assassin and not after the manner of Madame L'Espanaye.

Of the stories classified as tales of conscience, 'William Wilson,' 'The Man of the Crowd,' 'The Imp of the Perverse,' 'The Tell-Tale Heart,' and 'The Black Cat,' the first is not only the best,

## EDGAR ALLAN POE

but is also one of the best of all stories in that genre. The image of bodily corruption is not present and the interest is held by perfectly legitimate means. 'The Black Cat' is a fearful and repulsive piece, and at the same time characteristic. Poe hesitated at nothing when it came to working out his theme. He who had such absolute control of the materials of his art too seldom practised reticence in exhibiting the gruesome details of a scene of cruelty.

'The Fall of the House of Usher' is a representative story, if not absolutely the best illustration of Poe's genius. The motive of premature burial haunts him here as often elsewhere. But the emphasis of this tragedy of a race is laid where it belongs, in the terror of the thought of approaching madness. Poe wrote many stories which can be described each as the fifth act of a tragedy. It may be doubted whether he surpassed 'The Fall of the House of Usher.'

'Berenice,' 'Ligeia,' and 'Morella' are highly successful experiments in the realm of the morbidly imaginative, and might be grouped under Browning's discarded title of 'Madhouse Cells.' The themes are monstrous, and are only saved from being absurd by the author's consummate ability to carry the reader with him. Poe could scale a fearful and slippery height, maintaining himself with the slenderest excuse for a foot-hold. A dozen times you would say he must fall, and a

## POE'S TALES

dozen times he passes the perilous point with masterly ease. In the hands of a lesser artist than he, how utterly absurd would be a scene like that in 'Ligeia' where the opium-eater watches by the bedside of his dead wife.

'Metzengerstein' and 'A Tale of the Ragged Mountains' are stories of metempsychosis. 'The Cask of Amontillado' and 'Hop-Frog' turn on the motive of revenge. 'The Pit and the Pendulum,' an episode of the Inquisition, is a study of the preternatural acuteness of the mind while the body undergoes torture. 'The Assigination' is a Venetian tale of love and intrigue, and would have been conventional enough in the hands of any one but Poe. The most powerful story in the group is 'The Red Death,' a lurid drama of revelry in the midst of pestilence.

Difficult as are the themes, and skilful as is the handling, these tales are in a way surpassed by the extraordinary group of romances in which Poe describes the meeting of disembodied spirits. 'The Power of Words,' 'The Colloquy of Monos and Una,' and 'The Conversation of Eiros and Charmion' are excursions into a world unknown to the rank and file of literary explorers, a world where the most adventurous might well question his ability to penetrate far. In these supermundane pieces, in the prose-poems 'Silence' and 'Shadow,' in 'Ligeia,' and in 'The Domain of Arnheim,' Poe's art is indeed magical.

## EDGAR ALLAN POE

Poe seems to have been fully persuaded in his own mind that he had the gift of humor. The extravaganzas and farcical pieces bulk rather large in his collected writings. In too many of them the author cuts extraordinary mental capers in the most mirthless way. 'The Literary Life of 'Thingum Bob, Esq.,' 'How to write a Blackwood 'Article' and its sequel, 'A Predicament,' satires all on the ways of editors and men of letters, are examples of Poe's manner as a humorist. The rattling monologue and dry, hard, uncontagious laughter of a music-hall comedian is the nearest parallel. The effect is wholly disproportionate to the bewildering activity of the performer.

In farces like 'The Spectacles,' 'Loss of Breath,' and 'The Man that was Used up,' the motives would be revolting were not the characters manifestly constructed of wood or papier-maché. The figures are neither more nor less than marionettes. If Madame Stephanie Lalande (aged eighty-one) dashes her wig on the ground with a yell and dances a fandango upon it, 'in an absolute ecstasy 'and agony of rage,' it is what may be expected in a pantomime. Whoever wishes to laugh at the hero of the Bugaboo and Kickapoo campaign, when he is discovered sans scalp, sans palate, sans arm, leg, and shoulders, is at liberty to do so, but he must laugh as do children when Punch beats his wife.

There is no question of the vivacity displayed

## POE'S TALES

in these pieces. 'Bon-Bon,' 'The Duc de l'Omelette,' 'Lionizing,' 'Never bet the Devil your Head,' 'X-ing a Paragrab,' 'Diddling Considered as one of the Exact Sciences,' 'The Business Man,' and 'The Angel of the Odd' are sprightly with an uncanny sprightliness. It must always be a matter for astonishment that Poe could have written them. The mystery of their being read is explained by the taste of the times.

On the other hand, 'The Devil in the Belfry' is genuinely amusing. The description of the peaceful estate of the pleasant Dutch toy village of Vondervotteimitiss, where the very pigs wore repeaters tied to their tails with ribbons, and the sad story of the destruction of all order and regularity by the advent of the foreign-looking young man in black kerseymere knee-breeches, are most agreeably set forth. This extravaganza is not only the best of Poe's humorous sketches, but ranks with the work of men who were better equipped and more gifted in such work than was Poe.

## V

## THE CRITIC

POE brought into American criticism a pungency which it had hitherto lacked. He was entirely independent, and had urbanity companioned inde-



## EDGAR ALLAN POE

pendence the value of his critical work would have been greatly augmented. He could praise with warmth and condemn with asperity ; he could not maintain an even temper. Swayed by his likes and his dislikes, he was but too apt to grow extravagantly commendatory or else spiteful. ‘ He ‘ had the judicial mind but was rarely in the judicial state of mind.’<sup>1</sup> He was not unwilling to give pain, and easily persuaded himself that he did so in a just cause. There was a pleasurable sense of power in the consciousness of being feared. Yet the pleasure thus derived can never be other than ignoble. A man of Poe’s genius can ill afford to waste his time in attacking other men of genius whose conceptions of literary art differ from his own. Still less can he afford to assail the swarm of petty authors whose works will perish the sooner for being let alone. Of all harmless creatures authors are the most harmless and should be allowed to live their innocent little lives. But Poe took literature hard, and authors had a disquieting effect on him.

Accused of ‘ mangling by wholesale,’ Poe denied the charge, declaring that among the many critiques he had written during a given period of ten years not one was ‘ wholly fault-finding or wholly ‘ in approbation.’ And he maintained that to every opinion expressed he had attempted to give weight ‘ by something that bore the semblance of a rea-

<sup>1</sup> E. C. Stedman.



## CRITICAL WRITINGS

‘son.’ Is there another writer in the land who ‘can of his own criticisms conscientiously say the ‘same’? Poe prided himself on an honesty of motive such as animated Wilson and Macaulay. He denied that his course was unpopular, pointing to the fact that during his editorship of the ‘*Messenger*’ and ‘*Graham’s*’ the circulation of the one had risen from seven hundred to five thousand, and of the other ‘from five to fifty-two thousand ‘subscribers.’ ‘Even the manifest injustice of a ‘Gifford is, I grieve to say, an exceedingly popular thing.’

Poe’s critical writings take the form of reviews of books (‘*Longfellow’s Ballads*,’ ‘*Moore’s “Alciphron,”*’ ‘*Horne’s “Orion,”*’ ‘*Miss Barrett’s “A Drama of Exile,”*’ ‘*Hawthorne’s Tales*,’ etc.), polemical writings (‘*A Reply to “Outis”*’), essays on the theory of literary art (‘*The Poetic Principle*,’ ‘*The Rationale of Verse*’), brief notes (‘*Marginalia*’), and short and snappy articles on contemporary writers (‘*The Literati*’).

His theory of literary art may be studied in the lecture entitled ‘*The Poetic Principle*,’ where he maintains that there is no such thing as a long poem, the very phrase being ‘a contradiction of ‘terms.’ A poem deserves its title ‘only inasmuch ‘as it excites by elevating the soul.’ This excitement is transient. When it ceases, that which is written ceases to be poetical. Poe even sets the

‘*Reply to “Outis.”*’

## EDGAR ALLAN POE

precise limit of the excitement — ‘half an hour at the very utmost.’

He then attacks ‘the heresy of The Didactic,’ protesting against the doctrine that every poem should contain a moral and the poetical merit estimated by the moral. ‘The incitements of Passion, or the precepts of Duty, or even the lessons of Truth, may be introduced into a poem with advantage, but the true artist will always contrive to tone them down in proper subjection to that Beauty which is the atmosphere and the real essence of the poem.’

Poe then proceeds to his definition of the ‘poetry of words,’ which is, he says, ‘*The Rhythmical Creation of Beauty.*’ Its sole arbiter is Taste. ‘With the Intellect, or with the Conscience, it has only collateral relations. Unless incidentally, it has no concern whatever either with Duty or with Truth.’

In his concrete criticism Poe never hesitated to prophesy. ‘I most heartily congratulate you upon having accomplished a work which will *live*,’ he wrote to Mrs. E. A. Lewis. Of some poem of Longfellow’s he said that it would ‘not live.’ Possibly he was right in both cases, but how could he know? Here is shown the weakness of Poe’s critical temper. He affirmed positively that which cannot positively be affirmed.

He was a monomaniac on plagiarism, forever raising the cry of ‘Stop thief.’ Yet Poe, like

## THE POET

Molière, whom he resembled in no other particular, 'took his own' whenever it pleased him to do so, and he was not over solicitous to advertise his sources. He was in the right. If poets advertised their sources, what would be left for the commentators to do? Poe hinted that Hawthorne appropriated his ideas, and he flatly accused Longfellow of so doing. He was punished grotesquely, for Chivers, the author of *Eoncks of Ruby*, accused Poe (after the latter's death, when it was quite safe to do so) of getting many of his best ideas from Chivers.

## VI

## THE POET

POE's claim to mastership in verse rests on a handful of lyrics distinguished for exquisite melody and a haunting beauty of phrase. That part of the public which estimates a poet by such pieces as find their way into anthologies regards Poe primarily as the author of 'The Bells' and 'The Raven.' If popularity were the final test of merit, these strikingly original performances would indeed crown his work. After sixty years neither has lost in appreciable degree the magical charm it exerted when first the weird melody fell upon the ear. Each is hackneyed beyond descrip-

## EDGAR ALLAN POE

tion; each has been parodied unmercifully, murdered by raw elocutionists, and worse than murdered by generations of school-children droning from their readers, about the 'midnight dreary' and the 'Runic rhyme.' But it is yet possible to restore in a measure the feeling of astonished delight with which lovers of poetry greeted the advent of these studies in the musical power of words.

The practical and earnest soul will find little to comfort him in the poetry of Poe. It teaches nothing, emphasizes no moral, never inspires to action. The strange unearthly melodies must be enjoyed for the reason that they are strange and unearthly and melodious. The genius of the poet has travelled

By a route obscure and lonely,  
Haunted by ill angels only,  
Where an Eidolon, named Night,  
On a black throne reigns upright,

and we can well believe that it comes

From an ultimate dim Thule, —  
From a wild weird clime that lieth, sublime,  
Out of Space — out of Time.

Wholly out of space and time was he who wrote 'Dreamland,' 'The City in the Sea,' 'The Haunted Palace,' 'Israfel,' 'The Sleeper,' and 'Ulalume.' It is idle to ask of these poems something they do not pretend to give, and it can hardly be other than uncritical to describe them as 'very superficial.' They are strange exotic flowers

## CONCLUSION

blooming under conditions the most adverse, a fresh proof that genius is independent of place and time.

In Poe's work as a whole there is unquestionably too much of brooding over death, the grave, mere physical horrors. Since his genius lay that way, he must be accepted as he was. But it is permitted to regret, if not the thing in itself (the domain of art being wide), at least the excess. Poe speaks of certain themes which are 'too entirely horrible' for the purposes of legitimate fiction. These the 'mere romanticist must eschew, if he do not wish 'to offend or to disgust.' And having laid down this doctrine, Poe goes on to relate the story of 'The Premature Burial.' It turns out a vision. But the narrator affirms that he was cured by the experience, that he read no more 'bugaboo tales — *'such as this.* In short I became a new man and 'lived a man's life.' Without assuming that Poe spoke wholly from the autobiographical point of view, we may believe the passage to contain a measure of his actual thought.

We may claim for him a more important place in our literature than do his radical admirers whose fervent eulogy too often takes the form of the contention that Poe was greater than this or that American man of letters. His strong, sombre genius saved the literature from any danger of uniformity, relieved it at once and forever from

*EDGAR ALLAN POE*

the possible charge of colorlessness. That strangeness of flavor which a late distinguished critic notes as a mark of genius is imparted by Poe's work to our literary product as a whole. Here indeed was 'the blossoming of the aloe.'



VIII

*Henry Wadsworth Longfellow*



# *Henry Wadsworth Longfellow*

## I

### HIS LIFE

**T**HE Longfellows are descendants of William Longfellow of Horsforth in Yorkshire, who came to New England 'about 1676,' settled in Newbury, and married Anne Sewall, a sister of Samuel Sewall, the first chief-justice of Massachusetts. 'Well educated but a little wild' is one of several illuminating phrases used to describe this young Yorkshireman. He joined the expedition against Quebec under Sir William Phipps (1690) and perished in a wreck on the coast of Anticosti. One of his sons, Stephen, a blacksmith, had a son who was graduated at Harvard, became a school-

**Samuel Longfellow:** *Life of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow*, second edition, 1886, and *Final Memorials of . . . Longfellow*, 1887.

**W. D. Howells:** *Literary Friends and Acquaintance*, 1900.

**G. R. Carpenter:** *Henry Wadsworth Longfellow*, 'Beacon Biographies,' 1901.

**T. W. Higginson:** *Henry Wadsworth Longfellow*, 'American Men of Letters,' 1902.

## HENRY WADSWORTH LONGFELLOW

master in Falmouth (Portland), and held important offices in the town government. His son, the third Stephen, grandfather of the poet, was judge of the court of common pleas, and representative of his town in the legislature.

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow was born at Portland, in the District of Maine, on February 27, 1807. He was the second son of Stephen Longfellow, a prominent lawyer, conspicuous in political life, a member of the Massachusetts legislature, and afterwards, when Maine acquired statehood, a representative for his state in Congress. The mother of the poet, Zilpah (Wadsworth) Longfellow, was a daughter of General Peleg Wadsworth, whose adventures during the Revolution bordered on the romantic. Through the Wadsworths the poet was a descendant of John Alden and Priscilla Mullens.

At the age of thirteen Longfellow printed in the Portland 'Gazette' his boyish rhymes on 'The Battle of Lovell's Pond.' He studied at private schools and at the Portland Academy, entered Bowdoin College, Brunswick, Maine, in the Sophomore year, and was graduated in 1825, the fourth in a class of thirty-eight. That he stood so high seemed to him 'rather a mystery.' Before leaving college he had begun contributing to the 'United States Literary Gazette,' a new bi-monthly, published in Boston and edited by Theophilus Parsons. In one year seventeen of his poems ap-

## LONGFELLOW'S LIFE

peared in the 'Gazette,' for which payment was made at the rate of two dollars a column. Five of these early poems were reprinted in *Voices of the Night*.

At the Commencement of 1825 the trustees of Bowdoin had determined to establish a professorship of modern languages. The chair was promised Longfellow when he should have fitted himself for it by study abroad. He sailed from New York in May, 1826, provided by George Ticknor with letters of introduction to Irving, Eichhorn, and Southey. He travelled in France, Spain, Italy, and Germany, mastered the Romance languages, planned certain prose volumes, and announced to his sister Elizabeth that his poetic career was finished. In August, 1829, he was back in America.

His appointment being confirmed and the stipend fixed at eight hundred dollars (together with another hundred for services as college librarian), Longfellow entered on his duties. During the next five and a half years he corrected bad French and Italian exercises, heard worse viva voce translations, in brief, was a pedagogue in all homely and trying senses of the word. With any one save a born drill-master the class-room soon loses novelty. In spite of the knowledge that he was useful in a chosen field of work, more than happy in his home-life (he had married, in 1831, Miss Mary Storer Potter of Portland), Longfellow felt the narrowness of his surroundings. Bowdoin was a

## HENRY WADSWORTH LONGFELLOW

little college and Brunswick a village. The young professor was ambitious. In his own phrase, he wanted a stage on which he could 'take longer strides and speak to a larger audience.' At one time he thought of buying the Round Hill School, and visited Northampton to look over the ground. Fortune had something better in store for him. Ticknor was about to resign the chair of modern languages at Harvard, and proposed as his successor Longfellow, whose translation of the *Coplas* of Manrique (1833) had attracted his notice. The position was formally offered and accepted; it was understood that Longfellow was to spend a year and a half in Europe before taking up his work.

Accompanied by his young wife, Longfellow crossed the ocean in April, 1835, and passed the summer in Stockholm and Copenhagen, studying the Scandinavian languages. In the autumn he was in Holland. Mrs. Longfellow died the last of November. Longfellow went to Heidelberg for the winter, and to Switzerland and the Tyrol for the spring and summer, and in December (1836) was at Cambridge preparing his college lectures.

He lodged at the famous colonial mansion in Brattle Street known as Craigie House, in a room that had once been Washington's. When Longfellow first applied, old Mrs. Craigie, deceived by his youthful appearance, told him that she had



## LONGFELLOW'S LIFE

‘resolved to take no more students into the house.’ Craigie House passed into the possession of Worcester, the lexicographer. Worcester sold it to Nathan Appleton, whose daughter Longfellow married in 1843. It then became the property of Mrs. Longfellow.

At Harvard the exactions of work were not like those in the smaller college, strictly pedagogical. Longfellow had time for literature and for society. The years were richly productive, as the following bibliographical lists show.

*Outre-Mer, A Pilgrimage beyond the Sea*, 1835; *Hyperion, a Romance*, 1839; *Voices of the Night*, 1839; *Ballads and Other Poems*, 1842; *Poems on Slavery*, 1842; *The Spanish Student*, 1843; *The Waif, a Collection of Poems*, 1845 (edited); *The Poets and Poetry of Europe*, 1845 (edited); *The Belfry of Bruges and Other Poems*, 1846; *The Estray, a Collection of Poems*, 1847 (edited); *Evangeline, a Tale of Acadie*, 1847; *Kavanagh, a Tale*, 1849; *The Seaside and the Fireside*, 1850; *The Golden Legend*, 1851; *The Song of Hiawatha*, 1855.

After eighteen years of service at Harvard, Longfellow, in 1855, resigned his professorship, handing over its responsibilities to a worthy successor, James Russell Lowell. Released from academic duties, he was able to give himself unreservedly to literary work. Even in these new conditions he enjoyed less freedom than would be supposed. Longfellow had become a world-

## HENRY WADSWORTH LONGFELLOW

famous poet and was compelled to pay in full measure the penalties of fame. The demands on his time were enormous. As his reputation increased there was a proportionate increase in the army of visitors which besieged his door. The uniform kindness of their reception encouraged hundreds more to come.

The beautiful serenity of Longfellow's domestic life was broken in upon by a frightful tragedy. One July morning in 1861 Mrs. Longfellow's dress caught fire from a lighted match. It was impossible to save her, and she died the following day. The poet never recovered from the shock of her death. How crushing the blow was may be faintly conceived from that poem, 'The Cross of Snow,' found among his papers after his death.

During the last quarter century of his life Longfellow published the following books: *The Courtship of Miles Standish*, 1858; *Tales of a Wayside Inn*, 1863; *Flower-de-Luce*, 1867; *The New England Tragedies*, 1868; *Dante's Divine Comedy, a Translation*,<sup>1</sup> 1867-70; *The Divine Tragedy*, 1871; *Christus, a Mystery*, 1872;<sup>2</sup> *Three Books of Song*, 1872; *Aftermath*, 1873; *The Masque of Pandora, and Other Poems*, 1875; *Poems of Places*, 1876-79 (edited); *Kéramos and*

<sup>1</sup> The first volume was printed in 1865 and sent to Italy in commemoration of the six hundredth anniversary of Dante's birth.

<sup>2</sup> *The Divine Tragedy*, *The Golden Legend*, and *The New England Tragedies* reprinted in order as parts of a trilogy.

## LONGFELLOW'S LIFE

*Other Poems*, 1878; *Ultima Thule*, 1880. The posthumous volumes were *In the Harbor*, 1882, and *Michael Angelo*, 1884.

All the customary honors with which literary achievement may be recognized were bestowed on Longfellow. Some were formal and academic, scholastic tributes to scholastic achievement. Others were spontaneous and popular, an expression of the heart. Two illustrations will suffice to show the range of the poet's influence. In 1869, during Longfellow's last journey in Europe, the degree of D. C. L. was conferred on him by the University of Oxford. In 1879, when the tree which overhung 'the village smithy' was felled, an arm-chair was made of the wood, and given to the poet by the school-children of Cambridge. Both these tributes were necessary. Each is the complement of the other. Taken together, they symbolize the characteristics of the man and the artist.

Of all American poets Longfellow reached the widest audience. And it was with a feeling of personal bereavement that every member of that vast audience heard the news of his death at Cambridge, on March 24, 1882.

II

LONGFELLOW'S CHARACTER

As a young man Longfellow was pretty much like other young men, fond of society and fond of dress. At Cambridge the sober-minded were a little disturbed by the brilliancy of his waistcoats. In the Thirties it was permitted men, if they would, to array themselves like birds of paradise. Longfellow appears in some degree to have availed himself of the privilege. After a visit to Dickens in London in 1842 the novelist wrote Longfellow that boot-maker, hosier, trousers-maker, and coat-cutter had all been at the point of death. 'The 'medical gentlemen agreed that it was exhaustion 'occasioned by early rising — to wait upon you at 'those unholy hours!' An English visitor who saw Longfellow in 1850 thought him too fashionably dressed with his 'blue frock-coat of Parisian 'cut, a handsome waistcoat, faultless pantaloons, 'and primrose colored "kids."'

In middle age his social instinct was as strong as ever, but he cared less for 'society.' He restricted himself to the companionship of his friends, holding always in reserve time for his dependants, of whom he had more than a fair share.

Longfellow was large-hearted. He liked people

## LONGFELLOW'S CHARACTER

if they were likable and sympathized with them if they were unattractive or unfortunate. He was open-handed, a liberal giver. Adventurers preyed upon him. He endured them with patient strength. When their exactions became outrageous, he made an effort to be rid of them. If unsuccessful, he laughed at his own want of skill and resigned himself to be imposed on a little longer. A weaker man would have sent these bores and parasites about their business at once.

Incapable of giving pain to any living creature, he could not understand the temper which prompts another to do so. Fortunately the violence or malignity of criticism had little effect on him. He could even be amused by it. Of Margaret Fuller's 'furious onslaught' on him in the 'New York Tribune,' Longfellow said, 'It is what 'might be called a bilious attack.'

He disliked publicity whether in the form of newspaper chronicle of his doings or recognition in public places. He thought it absurd that because Fechter had dined with him this unimportant item must be telegraphed to Chicago and printed in the morning journals. Fond as he was of the theatre, he sometimes hesitated to go because of the interest his presence excited. It was thought extraordinary that he was willing to read his poem 'Morituri Salutamus' at the fiftieth anniversary of his class at Bowdoin. He was delighted when he found he was to stand behind the old-fashioned



## HENRY WADSWORTH LONGFELLOW

high pulpit; 'Let me cover myself as much as possible. I wish it might be entirely.'

One trait of Longfellow's character has been over-emphasized — his gentleness. He was indeed gentle; but continual harping on that string has created the impression that he was gentle rather than anything else. In consequence we have a legendary Longfellow in whom all other traits of character are subordinated to the one. His amiability, his sense of justice, his entire freedom from selfishness and vanity, and his genuine modesty, which led him even when he was right and his neighbor wrong to avoid giving needless pain by intimating to the neighbor how wrong he was — all contributed to hide the more forceful and emphatic qualities. But the qualities were there.

Nothing is easier than to multiply illustrations of this poet's gracious traits of character. Holmes epitomized all eulogy when he said of Longfellow: 'His life was so exceptionally sweet and musical that any voice of praise sounds almost like a discord after it.'

### III

#### THE POET

AMERICANS sometimes disturb themselves needlessly over the question whether Longfellow was a great poet. It is absolutely of no importance



## LONGFELLOW THE POET

whether he was or was not. Of one thing they may be sure, — he was a poet. Song was his natural vehicle of expression. He had a masterly command of technical difficulties of his art. Language became pliant under his touch. Taking into account the range of his metres, the uniform precision with which he handled words, and the purity of his style, Longfellow is eminent among American poetical masters.

His sonnets are exquisite. His ballads, like 'The Skeleton in Armor,' have no little of the fresh unstudied character which charms us in old English ballad literature, a something not to be traced to the spirit alone but to the technique as well. The twenty-two poems of 'The Saga of King Olaf' show an almost extraordinary metrical power.

It must also be remembered that Longfellow popularized for modern readers the so-called English hexameter. *Evangeline* was a metrical triumph, considering it wholly aside from the innate beauty of the story or the artistic handling of the incidents. The poet did not foresee his success. In fact, as early as 1841, in the preface to his translation of Tegnér's *Children of the Lord's Supper*, Longfellow speaks of the 'inexorable hexameter, 'in which, it must be confessed, the motions of 'the English muse are not unlike those of a prisoner dancing to the music of his chains.' But here he was hampered by his theory of translation,

## HENRY WADSWORTH LONGFELLOW

by his anxiety to render as literally as he could the text of the original. When he took the matter into his own hands and moulded the verse according to his own artistic sense, it became another thing. Wholly aside from the pleasure *Evangeline* has given countless readers, it is something to have broken down prejudice against the hexameter to the extent of drawing out an indirect compliment from Matthew Arnold, whose self-restraint in the matter of giving praise was notorious.<sup>1</sup> Scholars have by no means withdrawn their opposition to the English hexameter. That a more liberal temper prevails is largely due to Longfellow.

*Evangeline* had a stimulating effect on one English poet of rare genius, Arthur Hugh Clough. A reading of the Tale of Acadie immediately after a reperusal of the *Iliad* led to the composition of *The Bothie of Tober-na-Vuolich*.<sup>2</sup>

Another of Longfellow's triumphs was so great as to make it difficult for any one to follow him. *Hiawatha* succeeded both because of the metre and in spite of it. Any one can master this self-writing jingle. 'T is as easy as lying. One hardly knows how facile newspaper parodists amused themselves before they got *Hiawatha*. Holmes explained the ease of the measure on physiological grounds. We do not lisp in numbers, but breathe in them. Did we but know it, we pass our lives in exhaling

<sup>1</sup> Lectures On Translating Homer.

<sup>2</sup> Prose Remains of Arthur Hugh Clough, p. 40.

## OUTRE-MER AND HYPERION

four-foot rhymeless trochaics.<sup>1</sup> To write a poem in the metre of the *Kalevala* still remains, with all its specious fluency, an impossible performance for any one not a poet. Thus Longfellow's success had a negative and restraining effect. He opened the field to whoever cared to experiment with the hexameter, but closed it, for the present at least, to any rhythmical inventions calculated however remotely to suggest the metre of his Indian edda.

### IV

#### OUTRE-MER, HYPERION, KAVANAGH

THE most popular of American poets first challenged public attention as a writer of prose. *Outre-Mer* is a group of pieces after the manner of Irving. *Hyperion* is a romance 'in the old style,' and shows the influence of Jean Paul Richter. *Kavanagh*, published ten years after *Hyperion*, is a novel.

Neither of the first two books is marked by a buoyant Americanism. *Outre-Mer* does not, for example, suggest *A Tramp Abroad*, and certainly Paul Flemming is no kinsman of 'Harris.' In other words, Europe was as yet too remote to be made the subject of easy jest. Men did not 'run over' to the Continent. The trip cost them dear

<sup>1</sup> Holmes : *Pages from an Old Volume of Life*.

## HENRY WADSWORTH LONGFELLOW

in time and money, and was not without the element of anticipated danger. Travelling America was unsophisticated and viewed the Old World with childlike curiosity. Foreign lands were transfigured in the romantic haze through which they were seen.

The chapters of *Outre-Mer* were written by a man too intoxicated with the charm of European life to be annoyed by the petty irritations that worry hardened tourists. Rouen, Paris, Auteuil, Madrid, El Pardo, Rome in midsummer, afford the Pilgrim only delight. As in all books of the kind there are interpolated stories, and in this book interpolated literary essays. Every page betrays the student and the lover of literature, who quotes Jeremy Taylor and Sir Thomas Browne at Père la Chaise, James Howell at Venice, and Shakespeare everywhere.

*Hyperion* is steeped in sentiment—almost in sentimentality. Such a book could only have been written when the heart was young. It is a mistake, however, to read the volume as an autobiography; the author objected to its being so read. More important than the love story are the romantic descriptions of the Rhine and the Swiss Alps and the golden atmosphere enveloping it all. Both these books have a common object, namely, to interpret the Old World to the New.

When *Outre-Mer* was published an admirer said that the author of *The Sketch Book* must look

## KAVANAGH

to his laurels. The praise implied was extravagant, but not groundless. Longfellow's prose has a measure of the sweetness and urbanity which we associate with Irving. Both writers are classic in their serenity, and if highly artificial at times never absurdly stilted. They often appear in old-fashioned dress, but they wear the costume easily and it becomes them. The modern reader, with a taste dulled by high seasoning, marvels how the grandparents could find pleasure in *Hyperion*. It would be to the modern reader's advantage to forswear sack for a while and get himself into a condition to enjoy what so greatly delighted the grandparents.

Besides a group of literary essays (published in his collected works under the title of 'Drift-wood') Longfellow wrote a novel of New England life, *Kavanagh*, which suffered by coming too soon after *Evangeline*. It seems colorless when placed beside the romantic tale of *Acadie*. Yet one can well afford to take time to learn of Mr. Pendexter's griefs, and incidentally to become acquainted with Billy Wilmerdings, who was turned out of school for playing truant, and 'promised his mother, if she would not whip him, he would 'experience religion.' Hawthorne was enthusiastic over *Kavanagh*; he, however, disclosed the secret of its unpopularity when he said to Longfellow: 'Nobody but yourself would dare to write 'so quiet a book.'



## V

## VOICES OF THE NIGHT, BALLADS, SPANISH STUDENT, BELFRY OF BRUGES, THE SEASIDE AND THE FIRESIDE

LONGFELLOW served the cause of his art in two ways: first, he was an original poet, having a genius which, if not profound, or brilliant, or massive, or bewilderingly fresh and new, was eminently poetical and eminently attractive; second, he was an enthusiastic interpreter of the poetry of other lands through the medium of trustworthy and graceful translations.

In *Voices of the Night*, his earliest volume of verse, the translations, from Manrique, Lope de Vega, Dante, Charles d'Orléans, Klopstock, and Uhland, outnumber the original pieces almost two to one. Their characteristic is fidelity in spirit and letter. They illustrate the genius of a poet who found pleasure in giving wider audience to the work of men he loved, and who did his utmost to preserve the singular qualities of these men.

Longfellow's second volume, *Ballads and Other Poems*, contains only four translations, but one of them is Tegnér's *Children of the Lord's Supper*, in three hundred and fifty hexameter verses. *The Belfry of Bruges* contains a handful of translations



## TRANSLATIONS

from the German, including a lyric of Heine's done in a way to cause regret that Longfellow did not put more of the *Buch der Lieder* into English. In *The Seaside and the Fireside* is given entire 'The Blind Girl of Castèl Cuillè' by the barber-poet Jasmin.

The translations bulk so large and are so plainly a labor of love that it would seem as if Longfellow regarded such work an important part of his poetic mission. At the present time there is no need to urge the translator to 'aggrandize his office.' He does so cheerfully. Sometimes it is done for him. Are we not told that Fitzgerald was a greater poet than Omar Khayyám? In 1840 the office had not grown so great.

This interpretative work by no means ended when Longfellow's fame as a creative poet was at its height and there was every incentive to build for himself. When compiling (with Felton's aid) the *Poets and Poetry of Europe* he translated many pieces for the volume. He gave years to reproducing in English the majesty of Dante's verse, counting himself fortunate if his transcript, made in all reverence and love, approached its great original. This disinterestedness in the exercise of his art is so greatly to his honor that praise becomes impertinent. Catholic in his attitude toward workers in the field of poesy, Longfellow recognized the truth of the line

Many the songs, but song is one.

## HENRY WADSWORTH LONGFELLOW

Longfellow's early verse had all the requisites for popularity ; it is clear, melodious, simple in its lessons, tinged with sentiment and melancholy, dashed with romantic color, and abounding in phrases which catch the ear and pulsate in the brain. The poet voices the longings, regrets, fears, aspirations, the restlessness, or the faith, which go to make up the warp and woof of everyday life. An allegory, a moralized legend, a song, a meditation, a ballad, — these are what we find in turning the leaves of *Voices of the Night* or the *Ballads*. Here is a certain popular quality not to be attained by taking thought. 'A Psalm of Life,' 'Flowers,' 'The Beleaguered City,' 'The Village Blacksmith,' 'The Rainy Day,' 'Maidenhood,' 'Excelsior,' 'The Bridge,' 'The Day is Done,' 'Resignation,' 'The Builders,' are a few among many illustrations of the type of verse which carried Longfellow's name into every home where poetry is read. The range of emotions expressed is of the simplest. There is feeling, but no thinking. The robust reader who perchance has battered of late on sturdy diet, like *Fifine at the Fair*, hardly knows what to make of these poems, so little resistance do they offer to the mind. The meaning lies on the surface. But it is no less true that their essence is poetical. The one thing never lacking is the note of distinction. The human quality to be found in such a poem as the 'Footsteps of 'Angels' almost overpowers the poetic element.

## LONGFELLOW'S BALLADS

Nevertheless the poetry is there, and by virtue of this Longfellow's early work lives.

Other poems show his scholar's love for the past. They express the natural longing felt by an inhabitant of a crude new land for countries where romance lies thick because history is ancient. 'The Belfry of Bruges' and 'Nuremberg' are examples. Moreover Longfellow's ballads have genuine quality. 'The Skeleton in Armor' illustrates his study of Scandinavian literature. 'The Wreck of the Hesperus' is based on an actual incident which came under his notice. The criticism reflecting on this ballad because the poet had never seen the reef of Norman's Woe, is superfine. Longfellow was born and reared almost within a stone's throw of the Atlantic. His knowledge of the ocean began with his first lessons in life. His sea poems are distinctive. 'The Building of the Ship,' 'The Fire of Driftwood,' 'Sir Humphrey Gilbert,' 'The Secret of the Sea,' 'The Lighthouse,' 'Chrysaor,' and 'Seaweed,' whether or not they deserve the praise Henley gives them, will always be accounted among Longfellow's characteristic pieces.

Two other works may be noted in this section: the *Poems on Slavery* and a play, *The Spanish Student*. The first of these, though academic, shows how early Longfellow took his rank with the unpopular minority. *The Spanish Student*, a play based on *La Gitanilla* of Cervantes, was written

## HENRY WADSWORTH LONGFELLOW

*con amore*, and ‘with a celerity of which I did not ‘think myself capable.’ Longfellow had great hopes of its success, though he seems not to have been ambitious for a dramatic presentation. The success was to come through the reader. *The Spanish Student* shows that Longfellow could have written good acting plays had he chosen to submit to the irritations and rebuffs which are the inevitable preliminary to dramatic good fortune.

### VI

#### EVANGELINE, HIAWATHA, MILES STANDISH, TALES OF A WAYSIDE INN

*Evangeline* and *Hiawatha* mark the climax of Longfellow’s contemporary popularity and may be regarded as the principal bulwarks of his fame. There is an anecdote to the effect that Hawthorne, to whom the subject of *Evangeline* was proposed, was not attracted by it, while Longfellow seized on it eagerly. Such was the divergence of their genius. Longfellow’s mind always sought the fair uplands of thought, checkered with alternate sunshine and shadow; it did not willingly traverse deep ravines, gloomy and mysterious, or haunted groves such as those about which Hawthorne’s spirit loved to keep. The instinct which led the

## EVANGELINE

one poet to reject the narrative was as infallible as that which led the other to appropriate it.

The tale of Acadie is engrossing in its very nature, and whether told in prose or verse must always invite, even chain, the attention. It is dramatic without being melodramatic. The characters are not mere 'persons' of the drama, they are types. Evangeline will always stand for something more than the figure of an unhappy Acadian girl bereft of her lover. As Longfellow has painted her, she is the incarnation of beauty, devotion, maidenly pride, self-abnegation. So too of the other characters, Gabriel, old Basil, Benedict; each has that added strength which a character conceived dramatically is bound to have if it shall prove typical as well.

Longfellow gave himself little anxiety about the historic difficulties of the Acadian question. It was enough for him that these unhappy people were carried away from their homes and that much misery ensued. He painted the French Neutrals as a romancer must. Father Felician was not sketched from the Abbé Le Loutre, nor was life in the actual Grand Pré altogether idyllic.

*Evangeline* aroused interest in French-American history. For example, Whewell wrote to Bancroft to say that he feared Longfellow had some historical basis for the story and to ask for information.

In the Plymouth idyl of the choleric little cap-



## HENRY WADSWORTH LONGFELLOW

tain who believed that the way to get a thing well done was to do it one's self, and who exemplified his theory by having his secretary make a proposal of marriage for him, Longfellow made one of his most fortunate strokes. *The Courtship of Miles Standish* showed the poetic possibilities in the harsh, dry annals of early colonial life. The wonder is that so few adventurers have cared to follow the path indicated.

Bound up with the story of Priscilla and John Alden is a handful of poems to which Longfellow gave the collective title of 'Birds of Passage.' Here are several fine examples of his art: 'The Warden of the Cinque-Ports,' 'Haunted Houses,' 'The Jewish Cemetery at Newport,' 'Oliver Basselin,' 'Victor Galbraith,' 'My Lost Youth,' 'The Discoverer of the North Cape,' and 'Sandalphon.' It is a question whether in these eight poems we have not a small but well-nigh perfect Longfellow anthology. Certainly no selection of his writings can pretend to be characteristic which does not contain them.

*Hiawatha* was not intended for a poetic commentary on the manners and customs of the North American Indians, though that impression sometimes obtains. It is a free handling of Ojibway legends drawn from Schoolcraft's *Algic Researches* and supplemented by other accounts of Indian life. The grossness of the red man's character, his cruelty, his primitive views of clean-



## HIAWATHA

liness, are wisely kept in the background, and his noble and picturesque qualities brought to the front. The psychology is extremely simple. This Indian edda must be enjoyed for its atmosphere of the forest, its childlike spirit, and its humor. Hiawatha was a friend of animals (when he was not their enemy), and understood them even better than writers of modern nature-books. One does not need to be young again to enjoy the account of Hiawatha's fishing in company with his friend the squirrel. The sturgeon swallows them both, and the squirrel helps Hiawatha get the canoe crossways in the fish, a timely service in recognition of which (after both have been rescued) he receives the honorable name of Tail-in-air. In fact, the poem abounds in observations of animal life which as yet await the sanction of John Burroughs.

Taking a series of poems on the half-real, half-mythical King Olaf, adding thereto a group of contrasting tales from Spanish, Italian, Jewish, and American sources, assigning each narrative to an appropriate character, binding the whole together with an Introduction, Interludes, and a Conclusion, Longfellow produced the genial *Tales of a Wayside Inn*. The device of the poem is old, but it can always be given a new turn. Adapted to prose as well as verse, it may be used 'in little,' as Hardy has done in *A Few Crusted Characters*, or in larger form, as in *A Group of Noble Dames*.

## HENRY WADSWORTH LONGFELLOW

No secret was made of the fact that the 'Way-side Inn' was the 'Red Horse Inn' of Sudbury, Massachusetts, or that the characters, the Sicilian, the Poet, the Student, the Spanish Jew, the Musician, and the Theologian, were real people, friends of Longfellow.<sup>1</sup>

The reader who takes up *Tales of a Wayside Inn* knows by instinct that he may not look for the broad and leisurely treatment, the wealth of beauty and harmony, which characterize *The Earthly Paradise* of Morris. That need not, however, prevent him from enjoying the *Tales* on quite sufficient grounds. The poems are often too brief; some are mere anecdotes 'finished just as 'they are fairly begun.' We are prepared for a more generous treatment.

Though not written for that complex and formidable entity 'the child-mind,' two poems in the collection, 'Paul Revere's Ride' and 'King Robert 'of Sicily,' are beloved of school-children and dear to the amateur elocutionist. The most original of the tales is 'The Saga of King Olaf,' drawn from the *Heimskringla*, and appropriately put into the lips of the Musician. It is a poem redolent of the sea and the forest. The theme was congenial to Longfellow, who loved 'the misty world of the 'north, weird and wonderful.'

Prompted by the good fortune of *Tales of a*

<sup>1</sup> Luigi Monti, T. W. Parsons, H. W. Wales, Israel Edrehi, Ole Bull, Daniel Treadwell.

## THE DIVINE TRAGEDY

*Wayside Inn*, the poet was led to make additions to it. A second part appeared in *Three Books of Song*, a third part in *Aftermath*. With these fifteen additional tales the three parts were then collected into a single volume.

### VII

#### CHRISTUS, JUDAS MACCABÆUS, PANDORA, MICHAEL ANGELO

As early as 1841 Longfellow had conceived the idea of an 'elaborate poem . . . the theme of 'which would be the various aspects of Christendom in the Apostolic, Middle, and Modern 'Ages.' In 1851 *The Golden Legend* appeared, with no word to indicate that it was the second part of a trilogy. Seventeen years more elapsed and *The New England Tragedies* came from the press, to be followed three years later by *The Divine Tragedy*. The three parts were then arranged in chronological order and the completed work given the title of *Christus, a Mystery*.

One may guess why the first part of the trilogy was the last to be published. A bard the most indubitably inspired might question his power to meet the infinite requirements of so lofty a theme. Longfellow's *Divine Tragedy* has received less than due meed of praise. It has an austere beauty. If

## HENRY WADSWORTH LONGFELLOW

a reader can be moved by the Scripture narrative, he can scarcely remain unmoved by this reverent handling of the story of the Christ. Through many lines the poet follows the Scriptural version almost to the letter, bending the text only enough to throw it into metrical form. Often the dialogue seems bald and the transitions abrupt because the poet allows himself the least degree of liberty. This severity and repression in the treatment are one source of that power which *The Divine Tragedy* certainly has.

Part two, *The Golden Legend*, is a retelling of the story of Prince Henry of Hohenek. Here, Longfellow reproduces with skill the light and color of mediæval life, if not its darkness and diablerie. The street-preaching, the miracle-play in the church, the revel of the monks at Hirschau, and the lawless gayety of the pilgrims are all painted with a clear and certain touch, but in colors almost too pale, too delicate. Longfellow had not the courage or the taste to handle these themes with the touch of almost brutal realism they seem to require.

The third part of the trilogy, *The New England Tragedies*, consists of two plays, *John Endicott* and *Giles Corey of the Salem Farms*, one dealing with the persecution of the Quakers, the other with the witchcraft delusion. The first is the better. Edith Christison's arraignment of Norton in the church, her trial, punishment, her return to the

## THE NEW ENGLAND TRAGEDIES

colony at the risk of her life, and the release of the Quakers by the king's mandamus, followed by Endicott's death, are vigorously depicted. The character of the governor is finely drawn, and the last scene between Bellingham and Endicott is a strong and moving conception. As he bends over the dead man, Bellingham says:—

How placid and how quiet is his face,  
Now that the struggle and the strife are ended !  
Only the acrid spirit of the times  
Corroded this true steel. Oh, rest in peace,  
Courageous heart ! Forever rest in peace !

The companion play, *Giles Corey*, shows what has been already observed, how little adapted Longfellow's genius was for dealing with psychological mysteries. He could understand the mental conditions and sympathize with persecutors and victims, but he could not reproduce the uncanny atmosphere enveloping the witchcraft tragedies. *Giles Corey* is a finished study of a theme which might have been developed into a powerful play. It is profitable reading, yet if one would be carried back into the horrors of that time he must go to Hawthorne's 'Young Goodman Brown' and not to *Giles Corey*. Poets are notorious for taking liberties with the facts of history. But according to the late John Fiske, the poetical conception of Cotton Mather as set forth in *The New England Tragedies* is much nearer truth than the popular conception of the great Puritan minister based on the teachings of historians.



## HENRY WADSWORTH LONGFELLOW

The little five-act play, *Judas Maccabæus*, is a piece of careful workmanship, like everything to which Longfellow put his hand, and the scene between Antiochus and Máhala rises into passionate energy. *The Masque of Pandora* was more to Longfellow's taste, and if it does not satisfy the classical scholar, who is proverbially hard to please, it remains an attractive setting of one of the most attractive of mythological stories.

The dramatic poem, *Michael Angelo*, though not usually accounted Longfellow's masterpiece, better deserves that rank than certain more popular performances. Besides being a lovely example of his art, it is the expression of his maturest thought. He kept it by him for years, working on it with loving care, adding new scenes from time to time and weighing critically the value of those already written. Finally he put it to one side, and to show that he had not entirely carried out his idea, the words 'A Fragment' were subjoined to the title. It was published after his death.

*Michael Angelo* is not a play, but a series of dramatic incidents from the life of the great sculptor, illustrating his character, his thought, his work, his friendships. Many passages display a strength not commonly associated with Longfellow's poetic genius. Little is wanting to the delineation of Michael Angelo to create the effect of massiveness. From the first monologue where he sits in his studio, musing over his picture of the 'Last Judg-



## MICHAEL ANGELO

'ment,' to the midnight scene where Vasari finds him working on the statue of the Dead Christ, the effect is cumulative. The other characters are no less skilfully wrought. Vittoria Colonna is a beautiful conception, lofty yet human. Equally attractive with a more earthly loveliness is Julia Gonzaga, her friend, she to whom one to-day was worth a thousand yesterdays. Titian, Cellini, the Pope and his cardinals, Vasari, Sebastiano, the old servant Urbino, and the aged monk at Monte Luca effectively sustain the parts assigned them, and unite to bring into always stronger relief the character of the unique genius whom Longfellow has made his central figure.

### VIII

#### LAST WORKS

THE translation of Dante was a difficult task to which Longfellow gave himself for years with something like consecration. It is satisfactory or it is not, according to the point of view. He who holds that verse can never be translated into verse, and that a poem suffers least by being rendered in prose, will make no exception in Longfellow's case. On the other hand, the reader who is not, and who has neither the opportunity nor the power to become a scholar in Italian, owes Long-

## HENRY WADSWORTH LONGFELLOW

fellow an inestimable debt of gratitude. The unpoetic accuracy of which some complain counts for a virtue. The translation remains, with all that can be said against it, the work of a poet.

As age came on, Longfellow's own verse, instead of losing in charm, the rather increased. *Kéramos*, *Ultima Thule*, and *In the Harbor* contain many of his loveliest and most gracious poems. 'Not to be tuneless in old age' was his happy fortune.

His skill in the sentimental, homely, and obviously moral has blinded not a few readers to the larger aspects of Longfellow's work. One wearies, no doubt, of the ethical lesson that comes with the inevitableness of fate. But there is no need of impatience, Longfellow does not invariably preach. Besides, all tastes must be taken into account. Many prefer the ethical lesson, unmistakably put.

Had Longfellow been more rugged, and had he been content to end his poems now and then with a question mark (figuratively speaking) instead of a full stop, there would have been much talk about the 'depth of his meaning;' and had he been frankly suggestive on tabooed topics, we should have heard a world of chatter about 'the largeness of his view' and the surprising degree in which he was in 'advance of his time.' Doubtless he lacked brute strength. Whitman could

## CONCLUSION

have spared him a little of his own surplus, and neither poet would have been the worse for the transfer. Nevertheless Longfellow had abundance of power exerted in his own way, which was not the way of the world. What preposterous criticism is that of Frederic Harrison, who characterizes *Evangeline* as 'goody-goody dribble'!

Perhaps Longfellow should be most praised for his exquisite taste. He was refined to the finger-tips, a gentleman not alone in every fibre of his being but in every line of his work. The poet of the fireside and the people was an aristocrat after all. Generations of culture seem to be packed into his verses. In a country where so much is flamboyant, boastful, restless, and crude, the influence of such a man is of the loftiest and most benignant sort.



IX

*John Greenleaf Whittier*





# John Greenleaf Whittier

## I

### HIS LIFE

**J**OHN GREENLEAF WHITTIER was born at East Haverhill, Massachusetts, on December 17, 1807. His father, John Whittier, a farmer, was noted for probity, sound judgment, and great physical strength. A man of few words, he always spoke to the point, as when, in relation to public charities with which he had officially to do, he said : 'There are the Lord's poor and the Devil's poor ; there ought to be a distinction made between them ' by the overseers of the poor.' He had imperfect sympathy with his son's literary aspirations, but it

**W. S. Kennedy:** *John Greenleaf Whittier, his Life, Genius, and Writings*, 1882.

**S. T. Pickard:** *Life and Letters of John Greenleaf Whittier*, 1894.

**Richard Burton:** *John Greenleaf Whittier*, 'Beacon Biographies,' 1901.

**T. W. Higginson:** *John Greenleaf Whittier*, 'English Men of Letters,' 1902.

**G. R. Carpenter:** *John Greenleaf Whittier*, 'American Men of Letters,' 1903.

## JOHN GREENLEAF WHITTIER

were unjust to say that he was wholly opposed to them.

Whatever lack there may have been on this score was abundantly made up to the youth by his beautiful and saintly mother. Abigail (Hussey) Whittier was her husband's junior by twenty-one years. From her the poet inherited his brilliant black eyes, a physical trait (mistakenly) supposed to have been derived from the old colonial minister, Stephen Bachiler, that enterprising and turbulent spirit who came to America at the age of seventy, founded cities, disputed the authority of the clergy, and finally astonished friend and enemy alike by marrying for the third time at the age of eighty-nine.

Young Whittier was apparently destined to the toilsome life of his farmer ancestors. He suffered under the 'toughening process' to which New England country lads were formerly subjected, and became in consequence a lifelong valetudinarian.

With his frail physique and uncertain health the 'Quaker Poet' affords a marked contrast, not alone to his own father, but to that mighty ancestor Thomas Whittier, founder of the American family, who at sixty-eight years of age was able to do his share in hewing the oak timbers for a new house in which he proposed to pass his declining days. The building was erected about 1688. Thomas Whittier enjoyed the use of it until his

## WHITTIER'S LIFE

death in 1696. Five generations of Whittiers were harbored beneath its roof, and here the poet was born. Although not a Quaker himself, Thomas Whittier was a friend of the Friends, and for taking the part of certain unlicensed exhorters was for a time deprived of his rights as a freeman.

Whittier was early a reader and soon devoured the contents of his father's slender library. So insatiable was his thirst for books that he would walk miles to borrow a volume of biography or travel. At the age of fourteen he became fascinated with the poems of Burns, and under their stimulus began to make rhymes himself.<sup>1</sup> On his first visit to Boston he bought a copy of Shakespeare. Scott's novels he borrowed, to read them delightedly but with a troubled conscience.

His poetic aspirations were encouraged by his elder sister, Mary, who, without Whittier's knowledge, sent the verses entitled 'The Exile's Departure' to the Newburyport 'Free Press,' a short-lived journal edited by young William Lloyd Garrison. They appeared in the issue of June 8, 1826. Whittier has described his emotions on first seeing himself in print. The paper was thrown to him by the news-carrier. 'My uncle and I were mending fences. I took up the sheet, and was surprised and overjoyed to see my lines in the "Poet's Corner." I stood gazing at them in

<sup>1</sup> Whittier's Autobiographical Letter, in Carpenter's *Whittier*.

## JOHN GREENLEAF WHITTIER

‘wonder, and my uncle had to call me several times  
‘to my work before I could recover myself.’

Other poems were offered and accepted. Curious to see his contributor, Garrison drove over from Newburyport to the Whittier farm. The bashful country boy could with difficulty be persuaded to meet his guest. Then began a lifelong friendship not unchecked by differences without which friendship itself lacks zest.

Garrison urged on Whittier’s parents the importance of giving the youth an education. Backed up by the influence of A. W. Thayer, editor of the Haverhill ‘Gazette,’ who offered to take the lad into his own home, Whittier got his father’s consent to his attending the newly established Haverhill Academy. He paid for one term of six months by making slippers, an art he learned from one of the farm hands, and for another term by teaching school, which seemed to him a less enviable mode of life than cobbling.

The favor accorded his verse stimulated invention. During 1827–28 he published, under assumed names, nearly a hundred poems in the Haverhill ‘Gazette’ alone. A plan for bringing out a collection of these fugitive pieces under the title of *Poems of Adrian* came, however, to nothing.

Garrison, who had been doing editorial work in Boston for the Colliers, publishers of ‘The Philanthropist’ and ‘The American Manufacturer,’ advised their getting Whittier to take his place.

## WHITTIER'S LIFE

Whittier edited the 'Manufacturer' from January to August, 1829, when he was summoned home by the illness of his father. But he had had a taste of journalism and politics, and relished both. From January to July, 1830, he edited the Haverhill 'Gazette.' His newspaper work made him acquainted with George Prentice of 'The New England Review,' published in Hartford. When Prentice left Connecticut for Kentucky, where he was to spend six months and write a campaign life of Henry Clay, he urged the owners of the 'Review' to engage Whittier as his substitute. Whittier was responsible for the conduct of the paper for a year and a half (July, 1830, to January, 1832). In spite of many drawbacks, his father's death, his own illness, a disappointment in love, the period of his Hartford residence was the happiest and the most stimulating he had yet known. He printed his first volume, *Legends of New England*, a medley of prose and verse, edited *The Literary Remains of John G. C. Brainard* (the sketch of Brainard's life prefixed to the volume throws much light on Whittier's reading), and brought out the narrative poem *Moll Pitcher*, a story of the once famous 'Lynn Pythoness.'

On his return to Haverhill he played his part in local politics and was talked of for Congress. Somewhat later he was drawn into the anti-slavery movement and for the next twenty-seven years this was his life. He was a member of the legisla-



## JOHN GREENLEAF WHITTIER

ture in 1835, and was reëlected the next year ; but in general terms it may be said that in publishing *Justice and Expediency*, and in uniting himself with the small, unpopular, and exasperating party of Abolitionists, he sacrificed hope of political advancement. He gave to the cause time, health, reputation, and when he had it to give, money. In company with Abolitionist leaders and orators he encountered mobs and speculated philosophically on the chance of losing his life.

In 1837 he acted as a secretary to the American Anti-Slavery Society in New York. From 1838 to 1840 he edited 'The Pennsylvania Freeman,' published in Philadelphia. During an Abolitionist convention, Pennsylvania Hall, in which were the offices of the 'Freeman,' was sacked and burned by a pro-slavery mob. Whittier, disguised in a wig and a long overcoat, mingled with the rioters and contrived to save a few of his papers. It was a more dangerous rabble than that he encountered during the George Thomson riot at Concord, New Hampshire, three years earlier. Whittier once remarked that he never really feared for his life, but that he had no mind to a coat of tar and feathers.

A true son of Essex, he soon wearied of city life. 'I would rather live an obscure New England farmer,' he said. 'I would rather see the sunset light streaming through the valley of the Merrimac than to look out for many months



## WHITTIER'S LIFE

‘ upon brick walls, and Sam Weller’s “werry beautiful landscape of chimney-pots.” ’

He really had no choice in the matter, having been warned to give up editorial work if he would keep his precarious hold on life. He obeyed the warning. But with Whittier journalism was a disease. He had a relapse in 1844, when he took charge of the ‘ Middlesex Standard ’ of Lowell, and again, in 1845-46, when he was virtual editor of the ‘ Essex Transcript ’ in Amesbury.

No restriction was placed on his doing work at home. He wrote unceasingly, prose and verse, reaching his literary audience through the ‘ Democratic Review ’ and his audience of reformers through Bailey’s paper, ‘ The National Era,’ both published in Washington. Whittier was corresponding editor of the ‘ Era ’ from 1847 to 1850, and printed in its columns, besides political articles, such now famous poems as ‘ Maud Muller,’ ‘ Ichabod,’ ‘ Tauler,’ and ‘ The Chapel of the Hermits.’

The list of Whittier’s chief publications up to the year 1857 contains seventeen titles: *Legends of New England*, 1831; *Moll Pitcher*, 1832 (revised edition 1840); *Justice and Expediency*, 1833; *Mogg Megone*, 1836; *Poems written during the Progress of the Abolition Question*, etc., 1837 (unauthorized issue); *Poems*, 1838; *Lays of my Home and Other Poems*, 1843; *The Stranger in Lowell*, 1845; *Voices of Freedom*, 1846; *The Su-*

## JOHN GREENLEAF WHITTIER

*pernaturalism of New England*, 1847; *Leaves from Margaret Smith's Journal*, 1849; *Poems*, 1849;<sup>1</sup> *Old Portraits and Modern Sketches*, 1850; *Songs of Labor and Other Poems*, 1850; *The Chapel of the Hermits and Other Poems*, 1853; *Literary Recreations and Miscellanies*, 1854; *The Panorama and Other Poems*, 1856.

The founding of the 'Atlantic Monthly' (1857) gave Whittier a more assured place. His work was sought and the pay was generous. He became an overseer of Harvard College in 1858. In 1860 the college made him a Master of Arts, and in 1866 a Doctor of Laws.

His home for many years was in Amesbury, the farm at East Haverhill having been sold in 1836. After the death of his mother and younger sister he passed much of his time with kinsfolk at the house known as 'Oak Knoll,' in Danvers. For all his admiration of women, Whittier never married. He enjoyed allusions to a supposititious Mrs. Whittier. Writing to his niece, Mrs. Pickard, about some friend who was unhappy over political defeat, Whittier said: 'I told him I had 'been in the same predicament . . . and got abused 'worse than he did, for I was charged with ill-'treating my wife!'

Whittier was a birthright member of the Society of Friends and influential in their councils. His advice was much sought and freely given

<sup>1</sup> The first collected edition made with Whittier's consent.

## WHITTIER'S LIFE

in terms of blended modesty, good sense, and humor.

During the last twenty years of his life Whittier published the following volumes: *Home Ballads and Poems*, 1860; *In War Time and Other Poems*, 1864; *National Lyrics*, 1865; *Snow-Bound*, 1866; *The Tent on the Beach and Other Poems*, 1867; *Among the Hills and Other Poems*, 1869; *Ballads of New England*, 1870; *Miriam and Other Poems*, 1871; *The Pennsylvania Pilgrim and Other Poems*, 1872; *Mabel Martin*, 1874; *Hazel-Blossoms*, 1875; *The Vision of Eckard and Other Poems*, 1878; *The King's Missive and Other Poems*, 1881; *The Bay of Seven Islands and Other Poems*, 1883; *Saint Gregory's Guest and Recent Poems*, 1886; *At Sundown*, 1892.

The honors accorded him on his seventieth, eightieth, and eighty-fourth anniversaries gave Whittier much happiness. He was especially pleased to learn that the bells of St. Boniface, in Winnipeg, Manitoba (celebrated in his 'Red River 'Voyageur'), were rung for him at midnight of December 17, 1891. Said the poet in his letter to Archbishop Tâché: 'Such a delicate and beautiful 'tribute has deeply moved me. I shall never forget it.'

Nothing was left undone that the tenderest love and wisest solicitude could do for his comfort. His last illness was brief. He died at Hampton Falls, New Hampshire, on September 7, 1892.

II

WHITTIER'S CHARACTER

WHITTIER's shyness was proverbial. Those who knew him also knew that beneath that shyness was a masterful spirit. Evasion and inconclusiveness on the part of those with whom he dealt would not avail. Whittier wanted to know where public men stood and for what they stood. A politician himself, he understood the art of dealing with politicians. To a certain candidate he said: 'Thee cannot expect the votes of our people unless thee speak more plainly.' Being in great need of the votes of 'our people,' the candidate was compelled to speak at once and to use the words Whittier put into his mouth.

Another possessed of like skill in controlling men might have grown despotic. Not so Whittier. Tactful and conciliatory, no grain of selfishness was to be found in his composition. He worked for the cause alone.

His physical courage, of which there are abundant illustrations, was fully equal to his moral courage. The nerve required to face a disciplined enemy, as in war, is always admirable; one would not wish to underestimate it. But it is a type of courage not difficult to comprehend. A glamour hangs about the battlefield. Men are carried on by

## WHITTIER'S CHARACTER

the esprit de corps. They do wonders and marvel at their own courage afterwards. Facing a mob is another matter. A mob is an assassin; the last thing it wants is fair play. Whittier had no experiences like those to which Bailey and Garrison were subjected, but he had enough to try his mettle.

He was one of the most modest of men, holding his achievements, literary and otherwise, at far lower estimate than did the public. To an anxious inquirer Whittier said that he did not think 'Maud Muller' worth serious analysis. He asked for criticism on his verses, and was not slow to act upon it when given. His open-mindedness is shown in the way he accepted Lowell's suggestion about the refrain of 'Skipper Ireson's Ride.' He defended himself when the criticism touched his motives or impugned his love of truth. Charged with having boasted that his story of 'Barbara Frietchie' would live until it got beyond reach of correction, Whittier replied: 'Those who know me will bear witness that I am not in the habit of boasting of anything whatever, least of all of congratulating myself upon a doubtful statement outliving the possibility of correction. . . . I have no pride of authorship to interfere with my allegiance to truth.'

He was a stanch friend, and a helpful neighbor. His filial piety was deep — no trait of his character was more pronounced. He was the most devoted of sons, the best of brothers.

The seriousness of Whittier's temper and mind



## JOHN GREENLEAF WHITTIER

was relieved by a keen sense of humor which found expression in many engaging ways. His letters written in young manhood are at times almost boisterously mirthful. His humor grew subdued as he became older, but it never lost its charm. Those who were nearest him realized how much it contributed to making him the most companionable of men.

### III

#### THE LITERARY CRAFTSMAN

‘I HAVE left one bad rhyme . . . to preserve ‘my well known character in that respect,’ says Whittier in a letter to Fields, his publisher. The charge of laxity in rhymes was the one most often brought against him. He labored under two capital disadvantages; he was self-taught and he wrote always for a moral purpose. His objection to reprinting *Mogg Megone* grew out of the feeling, not that it was bad poetry,—though he had no delusions about its artistic value,—but that it was not calculated to do good. Ethics, rather than art, were uppermost in his thought. There has never been question of his native power. He could be exquisitely felicitous, but, having acquired the habit of writing for a cause, of sacrificing nicety of phrase for vigor of thought and rapidity of utterance, being eager always to strike a blow at the



## THE LITERARY CRAFTSMAN

critical moment, he found it difficult to write with a dominant artistic motive. He wrote better (technically speaking) the older he grew. It is difficult to realize as we listen to the rich strains of his later years that Whittier could have been as inharmonious as he often was in the first period of his poetic life. He confessed his defect. To Fields he once said: 'It's lucky that other folks' ears 'are not so sensitive as thine.'

His variety of metres, if not great, was sufficiently ample to preclude the feeling of sameness. His verse never comes laden with scholarly suggestion in rhythm or thought, with the faint sweet echoes of old-time poetry, as does Longfellow's. Whittier was not 'literary,' though he made a noble addition to the literature of his country.

Whittier's prose has been ignored rather than underestimated. It is clear and forceful, often impassioned, and sometimes eloquent. Whether a reputation could be based on it is another matter. Certainly it has not been accorded the popular favor it deserves. Among a thousand readers, for example, who know *Snow-Bound* there are possibly two or three who have read *Margaret Smith's Journal*.

Of the seven prose sketches in *Legends of New England* not one was thought by the author worth preserving. He also suppressed much of the contents of the two volumes published some fifteen years after the *Legends*. Both these later books, *The Stranger in Lowell* and *The Supernaturalism of*

## JOHN GREENLEAF WHITTIER

*New England*, ought to be reprinted as they came first from Whittier's hand.

*The Stranger in Lowell*, a volume of more or less related essays, is in part a record of impressions made on the author during a brief residence in the new manufacturing town by the Merrimac. The extraordinary growth of 'The City of a Day' was then, and is still, a legitimate cause for wonder. All the eighteen papers are readable, and that entitled 'The Yankee Zincali' is a little classic. Whittier's next volume of prose, *The Supernaturalism of New England*, consists of nine chapters on witches, wizards, ghosts, apparitions, haunted houses, charms, and the like. It is rather a wide survey of the subject, from the Indian powahs to the Irish Presbyterians who settled in New Hampshire in 1720, and brought with them, 'among other strange matters, potatoes and fairies.' Whittier dwells on these traditions of his country with deep interest and sets them forth with no little humor. It is a fault of the book that he does not dwell on them at greater length.

*Leaves from Margaret Smith's Journal* is an admirable study of colonial New England in 1678. The style is sweet, the narrative flowing, the characters, many of them historical, are consistent and lifelike, and the tone of delicate irony running through the book is most engaging. Genuinely illuminating to the student of manners are such passages in the journal as those describing the or-

## THE LITERARY CRAFTSMAN

dination of Mr. Brock at Reading, the meeting at the inn with a son of Mr. Increase Mather, 'a 'pert talkative lad' abounding in anecdotes of the miraculous, the antics of Mr. Corbet's negro boy Sam, and the encounter on the way back to Boston with the good old deacon under the influence of flip. A strong and engrossing plot might have made the book more popular, as it might also have been inconsistent with the artlessness of what purports to be a young girl's journal.

*Old Portraits and Modern Sketches* is a volume of character studies of ancient worthies (such as Bunyan, Ellwood, Baxter, Marvell) and of two or three moderns (like William Leggett, to whom Whittier pays a generous tribute). *Literary Recreations and Miscellanies* consists of a reprint of material used in earlier books, together with a group of reviews and other papers.

### IV

#### NARRATIVE AND LEGENDARY VERSE

WHITTIER'S instinct drew him irresistibly to native themes. He believed that the American poet should write about America. 'New England is full of Romance,' he had said in his sketch of Brainard. 'The great forest which our fathers penetrated — the red men — their struggle and their disappear-

## JOHN GREENLEAF WHITTIER

‘ance—the Powwow and the War-dance—the ‘savage inroad and the English sally—the tale ‘of superstition, and the scenes of Witchcraft,— ‘all these are rich materials of poetry.’ And it is safe to assume that Whittier never questioned the wisdom of his own choice of subjects, though he was often dissatisfied with the treatment.

Much of Whittier’s early verse died a natural death. More ought in his opinion to have done so. He marvelled at the ‘feline tenacity of life’ exhibited by certain poems and thought it flat contradiction of the theory of the survival of the fittest. He destroyed every copy of *Legends of New England* that he could get his hands on. He would have been glad to suppress *Mogg Megone*. ‘Is there no way to lay the ghosts of unlucky ‘rhymes?’ he asked, when the question was raised of reprinting the story in the ‘blue and gold’ volumes of 1857. It had appeared in the first collected edition (1849), and again in 1870; but when the definitive edition was published (1888), *Mogg Megone* was consigned to ‘the limbo of an appendix,’ and printed in type small enough to make the reading a torture.

The plot is imaginary, but the characters are for the most part historical. The outlaw Bonython sells his daughter to the Saco chief Hegone, or, as he was commonly called, Mogg Megone. The girl murders the savage as he lies drunk in her father’s hut. For Mogg had boasted of killing

## LEGENDARY VERSE

her seducer. She flies to the settlement of the Norridgewock Indians to confess to the Jesuit Sebastian Ralle, and is repulsed by the angry priest, whose plans are thwarted by Megone's untimely death. Wandering about in agony, she sees the attack by the English on Norridgewock, when Ralle was shot at the foot of the cross, and later is found by Castine and his men, dead in the forest. The poem is spirited and abounds in incident, but it is melodramatic. It lacks the magic of Whittier's art. Nevertheless he unjustly depreciated it.

A better performance is 'The Bridal of Pen-nacook,' with its strongly marked characters of Passaconaway, Weetamoo, and Winnepurkit, its contrasting pictures of the rich Merrimac valley and the wild Saugus marshes. Along with this story of Indian life may be read 'The Fountain' and the musical stanzas of the 'Funeral Tree of the Sokokis.' 'The Truce of Piscataqua' and 'Nauhaught, the Deacon' are later poems illustrating Indian character.

Living in what had been for many years one of the border towns of Massachusetts, Whittier was naturally drawn to themes, partly historic, partly legendary, touching the struggles between French, English, and Indians. 'Pentucket' commemorates Hertel de Rouville's night attack on Haverhill. 'St. John,' a ballad of Acadia, describes the sack of La Tour's fortress by his rival,



## JOHN GREENLEAF WHITTIER

D'Aulnay. 'Mary Garvin' and 'The Ranger' are 'border' ballads.

Now and then he rhymes 'a wild and wondrous story,' such as 'The Garrison of Cape Ann,' which he found in the *Magnalia Christi*: —

Dear to me these far, faint glimpses of the dual life of old,  
Inward, grand with awe and reverence; outward, mean and  
coarse and cold;

Gleams of mystic beauty playing over dull and vulgar clay,  
Golden-threaded fancies weaving in a web of hoden gray.

A number of the poems turn on the witchcraft persecutions: 'Mabel Martin,' 'The Witch of Wenham,' and the fine 'Prophecy of Samuel Sewall.' In *The Tent on the Beach* are two more: 'The Wreck of the Rivermouth' and 'The Changeling.'

Whittier was always ready to speak on the injustice of injustice. His Quaker ancestors used to receive gifts of forty stripes save one. They were martyrs for the cause of religious liberty. And the sufferings of the New England Quakers was a subject always to the poet's hand. He contemplated the wrongs that had been righted and was grateful therefor; but it was a part of his mission to teach his readers what progress had been made since the days in which state and church united to persecute a harmless if sometimes extravagant people. The lesson may be found in such poems as 'How the Women went from Dover' and 'The King's Missive.' Whittier knew that injustice is always ridiculous, and a grim humor plays at times



## *VOICES OF FREEDOM*

about his treatment of events in that dreadful day, as in the story of Thomas Macy. The most characteristic setting of his general theme is to be found in the spirited ballad of 'Cassandra Southwick.' The incident is told dramatically by the heroine herself, but the passion which glows through the verse is true Whittier.

### V

## *VOICES OF FREEDOM, SONGS OF LABOR, IN WAR TIME*

THE militant note in Whittier's verse was sounded early. In 1832, when he was twenty-five years old, he wrote the stanzas 'To William Lloyd Garrison.' They were followed by 'Toussaint L'Ouverture' (1833), 'The Slave-Ships' (1834), 'The Hunters of Men' and 'Stanzas for the Times' (1835), 'Clerical Oppressors' (1836), and the stinging 'Pastoral Letter' (1837). He was now fairly embarked on his mission.

The brunt of his attack fell on supine Northern politicians, clerical apologists, and anxious business men who feared agitation might injure their Southern trade. Nothing was more abhorrent to Whittier than traffic in human flesh. He marvelled that it was not abhorrent to every one, and strove with all his power to make it so. America, in his belief, was a by-word among the

## JOHN GREENLEAF WHITTIER

nations, forever prating of 'liberty' while she bought and sold slaves.

As he was the assailant of timid vote-seekers, money-getters, and ministers who defended slavery 'on scriptural grounds,' so was Whittier the eulogist of all who made sacrifices for the cause, or who, like 'Randolph of Roanoke,' a man with every traditional motive to cling to the peculiar institution, testified against it. *Voices of Freedom* is a record of the guerilla warfare which Whittier waged during forty years against slavery. With the additions he made to it in the progress of the struggle, it became not only the largest division of his work but one of the most notable. The history of Abolitionism is written here. 'The Pastoral Letter' was Whittier's response to the body of Congregational ministers who deprecated the discussion of slavery as tending to make trouble in the churches. 'Massachusetts to Virginia' was called out by Latimer's case. 'Texas,' 'Faneuil Hall,' and the lines 'To a Southern Statesman' are a protest against the annexation of territory 'sufficient for six new slave states.' 'For Righteousness' Sake' was inscribed to friends 'under arrest for treason against the slave power.' The fine closing stanza deserves to be better known:—

God's ways seem dark, but, soon or late,  
They touch the shining hills of day;  
The evil cannot brook delay,  
The good can well afford to wait.  
Give ermined knaves their hour of crime;

## VOICES OF FREEDOM

Ye have the future grand and great,  
The safe appeal of Truth to Time !

‘The Kansas Emigrants’ celebrates the Western advance, the coming of the new Pilgrims, armed with the Bible and free schools. ‘Le Ma-rais du Cygne’ was written on hearing of the Kansas massacre in May, 1858. ‘The Quakers are Out,’ a campaign song (not included in the collected writings), celebrates the Republican victory in Pennsylvania on the eve of the National election : —

Away with misgiving — away with all doubt,  
For Lincoln goes in, when the Quakers are out !

Not the least notable among these poems is ‘The Summons,’ in which the poet contrasts the quiet of summer with the distant tumult of approaching war, and his knowledge of his place in the approaching struggle with consciousness of his inability to act.

The Voices of Freedom are often harsh and discordant. Lines were written in hot haste and sent to press before the ink had time to dry. The needs of the moment were imperative. There was little time to correct and no time to polish. Had Whittier possessed a lyric gift approximating that of Hugo or Swinburne, how wonderful must have been his contribution to our literature. For the cause was great and his devotion single. Much of the verse, however, is journalism.

## JOHN GREENLEAF WHITTIER

He rises easily to poetic heights. 'Massachusetts to Virginia' has a magnificent swing and pulsates with passion. When Webster's defection spread anger, consternation, and grief through the ranks of the party of Freedom, Whittier penned the burning stanzas to which he gave the title 'Ichabod.' This anti-slavery poem was published in *Songs of Labor*, and is justly accounted one of the loftiest expressions of Whittier's genius.

*In War Time and Other Poems* records the anxieties, fears, hopes, and exultations incident to the great conflict between North and South. Says the poet:—

'. . . our voices take  
A sober tone ; our very household songs  
Are heavy with a nation's griefs and wrongs ;  
And innocent mirth is chastened for the sake  
Of the brave hearts that nevermore shall beat,  
The eyes that smile no more, the unreturning feet !'

The volume contains 'Barbara Frietchie,' perhaps the most popular ballad of the war, based on an incident told to Whittier by Mrs. Southworth, the novelist. One must reconstruct the times to comprehend the extraordinary effect produced by this dramatic little incident. Iconoclasts have made havoc with the story. If their points are well taken, we have one proof more of the superiority of legend over history for poetic purposes. Other noteworthy poems in this volume are 'Thy Will be Done' and the magnificent hymn 'Ein Feste Burg 'ist Unser Gott.'

## SNOW-BOUND

We wait beneath the furnace blast  
The pangs of transformation ;  
Not painlessly doth God recast  
And mould anew the nation.  
Hot burns the fire  
Where wrongs expire ;  
Nor spares the hand  
That from the land  
Uproots the ancient evil.

## VI

### SNOW-BOUND, TENT ON THE BEACH, PENNSYLVANIA PILGRIM, VISION OF ECHARD

THE volume of 1860, *Home Ballads and Poems*, contained two perfect examples of Whittier's art, namely, 'My Playmate' and 'Telling the Bees.' To inquire what far-off experiences in the poet's life prompted the making of these exquisite 'ballads,' as Whittier called them, were idle, poets being proverbially given to the use of the imagination. The music of the dark pines on Ramoth Hill could be no sweeter than it is. The theme of either poem is common enough among bards, and perennially attractive. 'My Playmate' and 'Telling the Bees,' together with 'Amy Wentworth' and 'The Countess,' all show, though in varying degrees, how pregnant with poetic suggestion were the scenes amid which Whittier passed his life. Even that urban and aristocratic little poem 'Amy Wentworth' derives half its charm from



## JOHN GREENLEAF WHITTIER

the world of associations called up by the fog wreaths, the pebbled beach, and the sweet brier blooming on Kittery-side.

The above-named poems, together with 'The Barefoot Boy' and 'In School-Days,' suggest a phase of Whittier's genius which found complete expression in the 'winter idyl,' a picture of life in the old East Haverhill homestead.

*Snow-Bound* was published in 1866. What the author thought of it we now know: 'If it were not mine I should call it pretty good.' The public decided for itself and bought copies enough to fatten Whittier's lean purse with ten thousand dollars. The enviously-inclined should remember that the poet was nearly sixty when this happened to him. A twelvemonth later *The Tent on the Beach* was published and began selling at the rate of a thousand copies a day. Whittier wrote to Fields: 'This will never do; the swindle is awful; Barnum 'is a saint to us.'

Readers who find difficulty in comprehending the enthusiasm that *Snow-Bound* evoked must reflect that there are strange creatures in the world who actually like winter. For them Whittier had a particular message. He has reproduced the atmosphere of the New England landscape under storm-cloud and falling snow with utmost precision. No important detail is wanting, and no detail is emphasized to the injury of the general effect. The exactness and simplicity of the touch



## TENT ON THE BEACH

are wholly admirable. The result is as exquisite as the means to it are unostentatious.

*Snow-Bound* is a favorite because of its homely, sweet realism, because of the poetic glow thrown on old-fashioned scenes, because of the variety of moods (which, lying between the extremes of playfulness and deepest feeling, shade naturally from one to the next); and because of the reverential spirit, the high confidence and trust. The poem is autobiographical, but it needs no 'key' to give it interest. The characters are types.

In *The Tent on the Beach* it is related how a poet,<sup>1</sup> a publisher (who in this instance, contrary to the traditions of his race, is a friend of the poet), and a traveller beguile an evening at the seaside with the reading of manuscript verses from the publisher's portfolio. The tales, eleven in number, with a closing lyric on 'The Worship of Nature,' are too uniformly sombre. The one called 'The Maids of Attitash' is blithe enough, but the gray tints need even more relief.

Whittier's power in descriptions of sea and sky is displayed at its best in this volume. One does not soon forget this stanza from the prelude:—

Sometimes a cloud, with thunder black,  
Stooped low upon the darkening main,  
Piercing the waves along its track  
With the slant javelins of rain.  
And when west-wind and sunshine warm  
Chased out to sea its wrecks of storm,

<sup>1</sup> Whittier, J. T. Fields, and Bayard Taylor.

## JOHN GREENLEAF WHITTIER

They saw the prisms hues in thin spray showers  
Where the green buds of waves burst into white froth-  
flowers!

Even better is the description of the breakers  
seen by twilight: —

. . . trampling up the sloping sand,  
In lines outreaching far and wide,  
The white-maned billows swept to land,  
Dim seen across the gathering shade,  
A vast and ghostly cavalcade.

The change from the mist and confusion of the  
brief tempest to the clear after effect was never  
better rendered: —

Suddenly seaward swept the squall;  
The low sun smote through cloudy rack;  
The Shoals stood clear in the light, and all  
The trend of the coast lay hard and black.

*Among the Hills*, *Miriam*, and *The Pennsylvania Pilgrim* come next in order of publication. The first is a romance of New England country life; the second is 'Oriental and purely fiction;' the third, partly historical and partly imaginative, is an attempt to reconstruct life in Penn's colony towards the close of the Seventeenth Century. Whittier said of *The Pennsylvania Pilgrim*: 'It is 'as long as *Snow-Bound*, and better, but nobody 'will find it out.' The poet felt that too little had been said in praise of the humanizing influences at work in the colonies by the Schuylkill and the Delaware. The Pilgrim Father here celebrated is Daniel Pastorius, who planted the settlement of Germantown. He was the first American aboli-

## VISION OF ECHARD

tionist. The poem abounds in happy pictures of scenery, and in tenderly humorous sketches of the quaint characters who found peace, shelter, and, above all, toleration, under the beneficent rule of Pastorius.

*The Vision of Echard* will serve to introduce Whittier's distinctively religious poems. A characteristic performance, it admirably illustrates his manner, diction, cast of thought. First, the scenes of great natural beauty, where historical memories are overlaid and blended with ideas of ceremonial pomp associated with formal religion; and then, projected on this rich background, the dreamer and his dream. The blended walls of sapphire in Echard's vision 'blazed with the thought of 'God:.' —

Ye bow to ghastly symbols,  
To cross and scourge and thorn;  
Ye seek his Syrian manger  
Who in the heart is born.

O blind ones, outward groping,  
The idle quest forego;  
Who listens to His inward voice  
Alone of him shall know.

A light, a guide, a warning,  
A presence ever near,  
Through the deep silence of the flesh  
I reach the inward ear.

The stern behest of duty,  
The doom-book open thrown,  
The heaven ye seek, the hell ye fear,  
Are with yourselves alone.

## JOHN GREENLEAF WHITTIER

Whittier did not include 'The Preacher' among his religious poems. This fine picture of the 'great 'awakening' might be so classified. Also 'The 'Chapel of the Hermits,' 'Tauler,' and yet others. In general the religious poems consist of meditations on sacred characters and scenes, poetic settings of Biblical narrative, and reflective poems in which Whittier gives voice to phases of his spiritual life, and above all to a faith so broad that the distinctions of sect and creed are lost in its catholic charity. 'Questions of Life,' 'The Over-Heart,' 'Trinitas,' 'The Shadow and the Light,' and 'The Eternal Goodness' are the expressions of this lofty and inspiring side of his poetic genius.

Whittier's singing voice lost none of its flexibility but rather gained as time went on. 'The 'Henchman' was a striking performance for a man of seventy. 'It is not exactly a Quakerly 'piece, nor is it didactic, and it has no moral that 'I know of,' observed Whittier. He must have known that it had the moral of exquisite beauty. Indeed he admitted that it was 'not unpoetical.'

His last utterance was a little group of poems, *At Sundown*, having for the controlling thought the close of life's day. One of them, 'Burning 'Drift-Wood,' was the poet's farewell; and with the quotation of four of its stanzas we may bring to an end this brief survey of Whittier's work.

What matter that it is not May,  
That birds have flown, and trees are bare,

## AT SUNDOWN

That darker grows the shortening day,  
And colder blows the wintry air !

The wrecks of passion and desire,  
The castles I no more rebuild,  
May fitly feed my drift-wood fire,  
And warm the hands that age has chilled.

. . . . .  
I know the solemn monotone  
Of waters calling unto me ;  
I know from whence the airs have blown  
That whisper of the Eternal Sea.

As low my fires of drift-wood burn,  
I hear that sea's deep sound increase.  
And, fair in sunset light, discern  
Its mirage-lifted Isles of Peace.





X

*Nathaniel Hawthorne*



# *Nathaniel Hawthorne*

## I

### HIS LIFE

**A**MONG the passengers in the ship which brought Winthrop and Dudley to the New World was William Hathorne, the ancestor of the novelist. A man of character, versatile, naturally eloquent, and a born leader, he rose to a position of influence in the colony. One of his sons, John Hathorne, was destined to sinister renown as a judge at the trials for witchcraft held at Salem in 1691.

Daniel Hathorne, a grandson of the old witch judge, took to the sea, and during the Revolutionary War served as a privateersman. He had seven children. Nathaniel, his third son, also a sea-captain, married Elizabeth Clarke Manning, and became the father of Nathaniel Hawthorne,

Julian Hawthorne: *Nathaniel Hawthorne and his Wife*, second edition, 1885.

Horatio Bridge: *Personal Recollections of Nathaniel Hawthorne*, 1893.

G. E. Woodberry: *Nathaniel Hawthorne*, 'American Men of Letters,' 1902.

## NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE

the novelist, who was born at Salem, Massachusetts, on July 4, 1804.

Captain Hawthorne died at Surinam in 1808. The rigid seclusion in which his widow lived after her husband's death had a marked effect on her son, quickening his sensibilities and at the same time clouding his lively nature with a shadow of premature gravity.

Hawthorne's boyhood was passed partly at Salem, partly on the shores of Sebago Lake, in Maine, where his grandfather Manning owned large tracts of land. His reading for pleasure included Clarendon and Froissart, to say nothing of that old-time boys' delight, the Newgate Calendar. The first book that he bought with his own money was Spenser's *Faery Queen*. At sixteen he had read *Caleb Williams*, *St. Leon*, and *Mandeville*. 'I 'admire Godwin's novels and intend to read all of 'them.'

He entered Bowdoin College in the same class with Longfellow and Franklin Pierce, and was graduated in 1825. For the next twelve years he lived the life of a recluse in his own home at Salem, indulging his passion for writing and for taking twilight walks. It was the period of his literary apprenticeship. Later he was, as he says, 'drawn 'somewhat into the world and became pretty much 'like other people.' In 1828 he published, anonymously and at his own expense, a novel, *Fanshawe*. He made some mystery about it, binding by

## HAWTHORNE'S LIFE

solemn promises the few who were in the secret of the authorship, not to betray it. The public was indifferent to the book, and Hawthorne afterwards destroyed the copies he could find. His early sketches and stories were published in annuals such as 'The Token,' and in periodicals such as 'The New England Magazine,' 'Knickerbocker,' and 'The Democratic Review.' For the most part they 'passed without notice.'

In 1837 appeared a volume of eighteen of these sketches and stories, to which Hawthorne gave the title of *Twice-Told Tales*. An enlarged edition, containing twenty-one additional stories, appeared in 1842. Between the two, Hawthorne brought out a group of children's stories, *Grandfather's Chair*, *Famous Old People*, and the *Liberty Tree*, all in 1841, and *Biographical Stories for Children*, 1842.

When Bancroft became Collector of the Port of Boston, he appointed Hawthorne as weigher and gauger (1839). Thrown out by the change of administration (1841), Hawthorne invested his savings in the Brook Farm enterprise. This move (described by his latest biographer as 'the only 'apparently freakish action of his life') was made in the hope of providing a home for his betrothed, Sophia Peabody. He threw himself with good humor into the life of the community, planted potatoes, cut straw, milked three cows night and morning, and signed his letters to his sister 'Nath.

## NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE

‘Hawthorne, Ploughman.’ Reports circulated that the author of the *Twice-Told Tales* might be seen dressed in a farmer’s frock, carrying milk to Boston every morning; also that he was ‘to do the travelling in Europe *for the Community*.’

Brook Farm proved ‘thralldom and weariness,’ and Hawthorne abandoned it, losing, as he later discovered, the one thousand dollars he had invested. In July, 1842, he married and settled in the ‘Old Manse’ at Concord.

He had now enough and to spare of the leisure which a deliberate writer finds indispensable. In a room overlooking the battlefield (the room in which Emerson had written *Nature*) Hawthorne penned many of the tales afterwards incorporated in *Mosses from an Old Manse*. The period of his residence at Concord will always seem to those who have studied its many charming records not undeserving the characterization of idyllic. It was brought to a close in 1845, when there seemed a likelihood (made a certainty the following year) of his becoming Surveyor of Customs for the Port of Salem. Hawthorne held this post until June, 1849. His removal gave him time for the working out of an idea that had possessed him for many months, and which took shape in the form of his great romance, *The Scarlet Letter*.

From the spring of 1850 to the autumn of 1851 Hawthorne lived at Lenox in the Berkshire Hills, and there wrote *The House of the Seven*



## HAWTHORNE'S LIFE

*Gables*. He then removed to West Newton, where, during the winter of 1851-52, he wrote *The Blithedale Romance*. In June, 1852, he took possession of a house in Concord, which he had bought of Alcott. He had but fairly settled himself in his new home ('The Wayside' he called it) when his friend Franklin Pierce, now President of the United States, made him consul at Liverpool.

Hawthorne assumed his charge in July, 1853, and conducted its affairs with energy and skill until September, 1857. The period of his English residence was rich in experiences, of which social honors formed the least part. The quiet, brooding observer had no wish to be lionized and apparently discouraged the few well-meant advances that were made. He once saw Tennyson at the Arts' Exhibition at Manchester, and rejoiced in him more than in all the other wonders of the place; but it was like Hawthorne to have been content merely to gaze at the laureate without presuming on his own achievements as ground for claiming acquaintance.

After leaving Liverpool, Hawthorne spent two winters in Italy, where *The Marble Faun* was conceived. The greater part of the actual writing was done in England, at Redcar on the North Sea.

At this point it will be well to take note of Hawthorne's principal writings subsequent to the publication of the second edition of the *Twice-Told Tales*. They are: *The Celestial Railroad*, 1843;

## NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE

*Mosses from an Old Manse*, 1846;<sup>1</sup> *The Scarlet Letter*, 1850; *The House of the Seven Gables*, 1851; *A Wonder-Book for Girls and Boys*, 1852; *The Snow-Image, and Other Twice-Told Tales*, 1852; *The Blithedale Romance*, 1852; *Life of Franklin Pierce*, 1852; *Tanglewood Tales*, 1853; *The Marble Faun, or the Romance of Monte Beni*, 1860;<sup>2</sup> *Our Old Home*, 1863.

The posthumous publications are: *Passages from the American Note-Books of Nathaniel Hawthorne*, 1868; *Passages from the English Note-Books . . .*, 1870; *Passages from the French and Italian Note-Books . . .*, 1872; *Septimius Felton*, 1872; *The Dolliver Romance*, 1876; *Doctor Grimshawe's Secret*, 1883.

In June, 1860, after an absence of seven years, Hawthorne returned to 'The Wayside.' He felt the burden of the political situation now culminating in civil war. With little sympathy for the cause of Abolition, Hawthorne, when the conflict had actually begun, found it 'delightful to share 'in the heroic sentiment of the time' and to feel that he had a country.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Enlarged edition, 1854.

<sup>2</sup> Published in England under the absurd title of *Transformation*. Hawthorne wrote to Henry Bright: 'Smith and Elder do 'take strange liberties with the titles of books. I wanted to call 'it the *Marble Faun*, but they insisted on *Transformation* which 'will lead the reader to expect a sort of pantomime.'

<sup>3</sup> Letter to Horatio Bridge, May 26, 1861.

## HAWTHORNE'S CHARACTER

His health began to decline and he was spiritless and depressed. In March, 1864, accompanied by his friend W. D. Ticknor, he started southward, hoping for benefit from the change. Ticknor, who was seemingly in perfect health, died suddenly in Philadelphia. Hawthorne was unnerved by the shock. In May he undertook a carriage journey among the New Hampshire hills with Pierce. The friends proceeded by easy stages, reaching Plymouth in the evening of May 18. Hawthorne was growing visibly weaker and Pierce had already determined that he would send for Mrs. Hawthorne. Shortly after midnight he went into his friend's room. Hawthorne was apparently sleeping. He went again between three and four in the morning. Hawthorne was dead.

## II

### HAWTHORNE'S CHARACTER

'I AM a man, and between man and man there 'is always an insuperable gulf,' said Kenyon in *The Marble Faun*.

Hawthorne might have been speaking through Kenyon's lips, so accurately does the saying voice his private thought. He lived in a world apart. No experience of custom-house, consulate, or farm could bring him quite out of his world into the

## NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE

common world of men. Hawthorne had more reason than Emerson to complain of the wall between him and his fellow-mortals. When glib talkers were displaying no end of conversational change, Hawthorne kept his hands in his pockets. He had no mind to indulge in that form of matching pennies known as small talk.

Observers have voiced their impressions of him in different ways ; their testimony is not discordant. The romantically inclined described Hawthorne as mysterious. Plain people thought him queer. Even his brother authors found him odd. Longfellow described Hawthorne as ‘ a strange owl, a very peculiar individual, with a dash of originality about him very pleasant to behold.’ Yet Hawthorne was without a grain of affectation, and took keen interest in the homely facts of life. His books everywhere betray this interest. He who wrote that description of his kitchen garden in *The Old Manse* would seem to be just the man to lean over the fence and talk cabbages and squashes with some neighborhood farmer. And perhaps he did.

He was not fond of men of letters as a class—which is not surprising. The friends who stood close to him were not literary. Bridge was a naval officer. Pierce was a politician, representative of a type for which Hawthorne had contempt. Hilgard was a lawyer, a man of the world.

Hawthorne was not without his share of ‘human

## HAWTHORNE'S CHARACTER

'nature,' as we say. He had his prejudices, and they were sometimes deeply rooted. When smarting under a sense of injustice he could wield a caustic pen. He was a good hater, but not narrow-minded. He hated spirit-rapping, table-tipping, and all the vulgar machinery and manifestations of a vulgar delusion. He hated noise, brawling, and dissension. He loved his home. His letters to his wife reveal a nature of exquisite delicacy. He loved children, Nature, and he was chivalrous in his attitude towards the animal creation.

A trait of Hawthorne's character comes out in the following incident. He proposed to dedicate *Our Old Home* to Franklin Pierce. This was in 1863. The publishers, it is said, were filled with 'consternation and distress.' The ex-president's name was not one to conjure with. Hawthorne explained his position: 'I find that it would be a piece of poltroonery in me to withdraw either the dedication or the dedicatory letter. . . . If Pierce is so exceedingly unpopular that his name is enough to sink the volume, there is so much the more need that an old friend should stand by him. I cannot, merely on account of pecuniary profit or literary reputation, go back from what I have deliberately felt and thought it right to do. . . . As for the literary public, it must accept my book precisely as I see fit to give it, or let it alone.'



## NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE

Friendship sometimes has in it an element of perversity, and has been known to delight in petty martyrdom. There was nothing of this in Hawthorne. All he notes is that friendship is not a commodity.

### III

#### THE WRITER

HAWTHORNE knew the secret of producing magical effects by quiet means. He had perfect command of the materials by which are rendered the half tones, the delicate shadings, the mysterious opalescent hues of beautiful prose. Yet his manner is unostentatious and his vocabulary simple. There are writers in whose work the feeling excited of pleasurable surprise can be traced to a particular word glittering like a diamond or a sapphire. With Hawthorne the effects are elusive, not always to be apprehended at the moment.

The beauty of his prose is best explained by the beauty of the ideas; the natural phrasing serves but to define it, as physical loveliness may be accentuated by simplicity of dress. Hawthorne's thoughts, being exquisite in themselves, make ornament superfluous.

There is no trace of effort in his writing. *The Scarlet Letter*, for example, reads as if it had come 'like a breath of inspiration.' Such directness and



## THE WRITER

precision of touch must always be a source of wonder and delight, not alone to writers who fumble their sentences but to skilled literary craftsmen as well. In Henry James's admirable story 'The Death of the Lion'<sup>1</sup> is a paragraph which suggests Hawthorne's manner. The regal way in which the famous novelist, Neil Paraday, adds perfect sentence to perfect sentence is altogether like Hawthorne.

Economy of phrase is one of his virtues. In Hawthorne there are no wasted or superfluous sentences, not even a word in excess. Something inexorably logical enters into his work, as in the poetic art. This economy extends to his books as a whole. For stories so rich in ideas, so heavy with suggestion, they are short rather than long. Yet the movement is always leisurely. There is no haste or eagerness. A few strokes of the pen, made with restful deliberation, serve to carry the reader into the very heart of a tragedy. He cannot but admire the superb strength which with so little visible effort could bring him so far.

<sup>1</sup> Henry James : *Terminations*.

# NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE

## IV

### THE SHORT STORIES

#### *TWICE-TOLD TALES, MOSSES FROM AN OLD MANSE, THE SNOW-IMAGE*

HAWTHORNE's real entrance into literature dates from the publication of the *Twice-Told Tales*, a series of harmoniously framed narratives which have maintained their rank unmoved by the capriciousness of popular taste.

The sources are in part colonial history or historical legend and tradition. 'The Gray Champion' is an incident of the tyranny of Andros. 'The Maypole of Merry Mount' celebrates the madcap revelries of the first settlers at Wollaston. In 'Endicott and the Red Cross' Hawthorne records a dramatic incident in the history of his native town, and introduces, by the way, a motive that later was to develop into his masterpiece.

The 'Legends of the Province House' ('Howe's Masquerade,' 'Edward Randolph's Portrait,' 'Lady Eleanore's Mantle,' and 'Old Esther Dudley') have their warp of historical truth, but the imaginative element is dominant. 'The Gentle Boy' is Hawthorne's sympathetic tribute to the persecuted sect of the Quakers. 'Sunday at Home,' 'Snow-Flakes,' 'Sights from a Steeple,' 'Foot-

## TWICE-TOLD TALES

'prints on the Seashore,' represent a type of literature which former generations enjoyed, and which modern magazine editors would decline with energy and quite perfunctory thanks.

There are stories of horror and psychological mystery. The author of 'Markheim' might have chosen a theme like that treated in 'Wakefield,' or in 'The Prophetic Pictures.' His handling would have been different. We do not gladly suffer an obvious moral in these days. No one would now dare to put 'A Parable' for the explanatory title of his narrative, as Hawthorne has done in 'The Minister's Black Veil,' or advise the reader that the experiences of David Swan (if experiences those can be called where a man sleeps and things *do not* happen to him) argue 'a super-intending Providence.'

In *Mosses from an Old Manse* Hawthorne's gain in power is marked. He still 'moralizes' his legends; but the force of the conception and the richness of the imagery drive the philosophy into the background. The grim and uncanny humor of which Hawthorne had a masterful command is displayed to the full in this book. No better illustration can be cited than the scene where the old witch Mother Rigby exhorts the scarecrow, she had so cunningly fashioned, to be a man. It is a grotesque, a gruesome, and a mirth-provoking scene.

Hawthorne had brooded long over the super-

## NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE

stitious past with which his own history was so singularly linked. Among the fruit of these meditations was the story of 'Young Goodman Brown.' Like the minister in the fearful narrative of 'Thrawn Janet,' Goodman Brown had been in the presence of the powers of evil; but unlike the minister, he no longer believed in virtue.

*Mosses from an Old Manse* also includes odd conceits such as 'The Celestial Railroad,' a new enterprise built from the famous City of Destruction, a 'populous and flourishing town,' to the Celestial City. The dreamer in this modern Pilgrim's Progress takes the journey under the personal conduct of Mr. Smooth-it-away and notes with interest the improvements in methods of transportation since Bunyan's time. Less ingenious but no less amusing are 'The Hall of Fantasy,' 'The Procession of Life,' and 'The Intelligence Office.' Monsieur de l'Aubépine loved an allegorical meaning.

Between the *Twice-Told Tales* and the *Mosses* Hawthorne published a group of children's stories. *Grandfather's Chair* and the two succeeding volumes consist of little narratives of colonial history, in which our national exploits are celebrated in the tone of confident Americanism so much deplored by Professor Goldwin Smith. There are 'asides' for grown people, as when Grandfather tells the children that Harvard College was founded to rear up pious and learned ministers,

## THE SNOW-IMAGE

and that old writers called it 'a school of the prophets.'

'Is the college a school of the prophets now?' asked Charley.

'You must ask some of the recent graduates,' answered Grandfather.

The *Wonder-Book* and its sequel, the *Tanglewood Tales*, contain new versions of old classical myths, the Gorgon's Head, the Minotaur, the Golden Fleece, and nine more. Here the adult reader has a chance to feel the magic of Hawthorne's art in a form where it seems most tangible but is no less elusive. He will be astonished at the air of reality given these old legends.

The perfect example of his work in this genre (the child's story) is the initial fantasy of *The Snow-Image, and Other Twice-Told Tales*. Such complete interweaving of the imaginative and the realistic is little short of marvellous. And yet there are people who say that perfect art cannot subsist in company with a moral. They may be commended to the account of the common-sensible man who in the goodness of his heart brought the odd, glittering, little snow-fairy into the house and put her down in front of the hot stove.



## V

## THE GREAT ROMANCES

*SCARLET LETTER, HOUSE OF THE SEVEN GABLES, BLITHEDALE ROMANCE, MARBLE FAUN*

IN addition to being an engrossing narrative and in every way a supreme illustration of Hawthorne's art, *The Scarlet Letter* is a study in will power. Of the four human lives involved in this tragedy, that of Hester Prynne is the most absorbing, as her character is the loftiest. Carried to the place of shame, her dark Oriental beauty irradiates all about her, and she bears herself like a queen. Her punishment is her own, she will ask none to share it. Her sacrifice has been infinite, but it asks nothing in return. She bears with regal patience slight and insult, and that worst punishment of all, the wondering terror of little children, who flee her approach as of an evil thing.

Hawthorne has brought out with infinite skill the dreariness of the years following the public disgrace when Hester has no longer the help of a rebellious pride such as carried her almost exultantly through the first crises of the dungeon and the pillory. With a refinement of art the author adds one last bitter drop to Hester Prynne's cup of bitterness in the wasting away of her superb



## THE SCARLET LETTER

beauty. But as the lines of her face hardened and the natural and external graces disappeared, the great soul waxed greater, more capable of love and pity and tenderness. She became a ministering angel whose coming was looked for as if she had indeed been sent from Heaven.

It was a singular fancy of Hawthorne's to give Hester a child like Pearl, precocious, fitful, enigmatic, a will-o'-the-wisp, more akin to the 'good people' of legendary lore than to the offspring of human men and women. This too was a part of Hester's discipline, that this *un*-human, elf-like creature should have sprung from her, with a power transcending that of other children to mix pain with pleasure in a mother's life.

Looking at Roger Chillingworth as he appears in his ordinary life, one sees only the wise, benevolent physician, infinitely solicitous for the welfare of his young friend Arthur Dimmesdale. Surprise him when the mask of deep-thoughted benevolence is for the moment laid aside and it is the face of a demon that one beholds.

Without a grain of pity for his victim he probes the minister's soul. Morbidly eager, he welcomes every sign that makes for his theory of a hidden, a mental rather than a physical sickness. He gloats with malignant joy over the discovery that this spiritually minded youth has inherited a strong animal nature. Here is a deep and resistless undercurrent of passion which has led to certain results.

## NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE

An unflinching and cruel analysis will make clear what those results have been. Suspicion becomes certainty, but proof is still wanting.

For terrible suggestiveness there are but few scenes in American fiction comparable with that where Chillingworth bends over the sleeping minister in his study and puts aside the garment that always closely covered his breast. The poor victim shuddered and slightly stirred. 'After a brief pause, the physician turned away. But with what a wild look of wonder, joy, and horror! With what a ghastly rapture, as it were, too mighty to be expressed only by the eye and features, and therefore bursting through the whole ugliness of his figure, and making itself even riotously manifest by the extravagant gestures with which he threw up his arms towards the ceiling, and stamped his foot upon the floor! Thus Satan might have comported himself when a precious human soul is lost to heaven and won into his kingdom. But what distinguished the physician's ecstasy from Satan's was the trait of wonder in it!'

Dimmesdale is the deeply pathetic figure in this tragedy of souls. Seven years of hypocrisy might well bring the unhappy man to the pitiable condition in which he is found when the lines of interest in the story draw to a focus. Day by day, month by month, his was a life of lies. No course of action seemed open to the wretched minister which did not involve piling higher the mountain

## HOUSE OF THE SEVEN GABLES

of falsehood. To lie and to scourge himself for lying — this was his whole existence. We praise Hester Prynne's courage. Not less extraordinary was Dimmesdale's wonderful display of will power. A weaker man would have confessed at once, or fled, or committed suicide. The minister may not be accused of stubbornly holding to his course from fear. He feared but one thing: the shock to the great cause for which he stood, the shame that the revelation of his guilt would bring upon the church, the loss of his power to do good, the spectacle, for the eyes of mocking unbelievers, of the 'full-fraught man and best indued' proved the guiltiest. This were indeed 'another fall of man.'

Incomparable as *The Scarlet Letter* undoubtedly is, there are admirers of Hawthorne's genius who have pronounced *The House of the Seven Gables* the better story of the two. The judgment may be erroneous, it is at least not eccentric.

In handling the genealogical details of the first chapter, Hawthorne showed a deft touch. The descendants of the proud old Colonel Pyncheon are as clearly defined as if the name and station of each had been enumerated. With no less ease does one follow the fortunes of the humble house of Matthew Maule. This progenitor of an obscure race had been executed for witchcraft. All of his descendants bore the stamp of this event. They were 'marked out from other 'men.' In spite of an exterior of good fellowship,

## NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE

there was a circle about the Maules, and no man had ever stepped foot inside of it. Unfortunate in its early history, this family was never other than unfortunate. It had an inheritance of sombre recollections, which it brooded upon, though unresentfully.

Its life was linked with that of the proud house whose visible mansion was founded on property wrested from the old martyr to superstition. For Colonel Pyncheon had shown acrimonious zeal in the witchcraft persecutions, and unbecoming speed in seizing on the wizard's little plot of ground with its spring of soft and pleasant water. Inseparable as substance and shadow, wherever there was a Pyncheon there was also a Maule. An endless chain of dark events depended from that crime of witchcraft days. On the scaffold the condemned wizard prophesied concerning his accuser: 'God will give him blood to drink.' Men shook their heads when Colonel Pyncheon built the House of the Seven Gables, on the site of Matthew Maule's hut. They had not long to wait for the fulfilment of the prophecy. The spring became bitter, and on the day when the stately dwelling was first opened to guests Colonel Pyncheon was found dead in his study, with blood-bedabbled ruff and beard. Against this tragedy of old colonial days as a background Hawthorne projects the later story of *The House of the Seven Gables*.

In its simplest aspect the narrative concerns the

## HOUSE OF THE SEVEN GABLES

persecution of an unfortunate and weak representative of the Pyncheon family by a powerful and unscrupulous representative. At intervals through the centuries the spirit of the great Puritan ancestor made its appearance in the flesh, as if the Colonel 'had been gifted with a sort of intermittent immortality.' Judge Jaffrey Pyncheon stands as a modern reincarnation of the old persecutor of witches. Clifford, his cousin, is a victim of the law at one of those moments when the law seems to operate almost automatically. Suspected of murder, he might have been cleared had Jaffrey but told what he knew, the real manner of their uncle's death. This were to disclose certain of his own moral delinquencies, and Jaffrey keeps silent. And thus it happens that, both being in their young manhood, the one is incarcerated and the other enters on a path leading to influence, wealth, and good repute.

To the 'somber dignity of an inherited curse' the Pyncheons added yet another dignity in the form of a shadowy claim to an almost princely tract of land in the North. The connecting link, some parchment signed with Indian hieroglyphics, had been lost when the Colonel died; but the poorest of his race felt an accession of pride as he contemplated that possible inheritance. And the richest of modern Pyncheons, the Judge, was not proof against ambitious dreams excited by the same thought.



## NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE

Affecting to believe that Clifford knows where the lost document is hidden, the Judge tries to force himself on his victim, who, made almost an imbecile by long imprisonment, is now, after his release, harbored in the House of the Seven Gables and cared for by his aged sister Hepzibah and his fair young cousin Phœbe. And while the Judge is waiting, watch in hand, for the terror-stricken Clifford to come to him, Death comes instead. Maule's curse is fulfilled in yet another generation. The suspicion that would have fallen anew on Clifford is averted by Holgrave. But Holgrave, as he chooses to call himself, is the last living representative of the family of Maule the wizard. And it was for one of the persecuted race to save the unhappiest member of the family by which his own had suffered. Holgrave marries Phœbe Pyncheon and the blood of the two families is united.

Holgrave's sole inheritance from his wizard ancestor, as he laughingly explained, was a knowledge of the hiding-place of the now worthless Indian deed. For this secret a Pyncheon had bartered his daughter's life and happiness in former years.

The Judge Pyncheon of the story has been pronounced 'somewhat of a stage villain, a puppet.' This may possibly be due less to Hawthorne's handling of the character than to the inherent weakness of the hypocrite as presented in fiction



## BLITHEDALE ROMANCE

or drama. The patrician old woman turned shop-keeper is so perfect a study that praise of the delineation is almost an impertinence. And there is the great silent but living and breathing House of the Seven Gables, in the creation of which Hawthorne expended the wealth of his powers. It will always be a question whether in the spiritual significance he attaches to or draws from some physical fact this great literary artist does not show his highest power. And many a time one finishes the reading of this particular book with the feeling that the House of the Seven Gables is the real protagonist of the drama.

In respect that it is a beautiful example of Hawthorne's art *The Blithedale Romance* is deserving of all the praise lavished upon it; in respect that it is a picture of Brook Farm it is naught. The author himself freely admitted that he chose the socialist community merely as a theatre where the creatures of his brain might 'play their phantasmagorical antics' without their being exposed to the rigid test of 'too close a comparison with the 'actual events of real lives.'

The antics played are such as we witness daily when human puppets are swayed by various passions of love, jealousy, self-will, pride, humility, the instinct for art, or the instinct for reform. The bearded Hollingsworth, whose 'dark shaggy 'face looked really beautiful with its expression of 'thoughtful benevolence,' was, without being con-

## NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE

scious of it, a brutal egoist, capable of bending all people and all things to the accomplishment of his idea. He illustrates the weakness of strength, as Priscilla, so frail, nervous, and impressionable, illustrates the strength of weakness.

That Hawthorne intended to show in Coverdale the insufficiency of the profession of minor poet to make anything of a man, we shall not pretend; but his distrust of the worth of literature is well known. Coverdale's failure was no greater than Hollingsworth's, and he at least never played with hearts.

Zenobia is at once the most human, the most attractive, and the most pathetic figure in the drama. 'But yet a woman,' and too much woman, so that her imperial beauty and grace, her wealth, her skill to command, her magnetic charm, and her intellectual gifts were insufficient to save her. No less regal in endowment than was Hester Prynne, she sank under a burden infinitely lighter than Hester's. Her nature was strong but impulsive, and impulsiveness was Zenobia's ruin.

Rome is the scene of *The Marble Faun*, the longest of Hawthorne's romances, and in his opinion the best. The author professed to have seen, in the studio of an American sculptor, Kenyon, an unfinished portrait bust, certain traits of which led him to ask the history of the original. This face, of a beautiful youth, might have been mistaken for a not fortunate attempt to reproduce the

## THE MARBLE FAUN

roguish countenance of the Faun of Praxiteles. The resemblance was external merely; the beholder presently detected something inscrutable in the eyes, in the whole expression, as if powers of the soul hitherto dormant were awaking, and with the awakening had come anxiety, longing, grief, remorse, in short a knowledge of good through a sudden apprehension of evil.

It was the portrait of a young Count of Monte Beni (known as Donatello), whose family, an ancient one, was believed to have sprung from the union of one of those fabled woodland creatures, half animal, half god, and an earthly maiden. At long intervals the traits defining the origin of the race were accentuated in a member of the family. He was said to be 'true Monte Beni.' He lived on the border line between two worlds, fearless and happy, but also unthinking, a creature incapable of doing wrong because his life was free, natural, instinctive. Such was Donatello.

The idea of a creature who should unite the characteristics of the wild and the human fascinated Hawthorne. The charm is elusive, and must be elusive or it is no longer charming. Hawthorne warns us against letting the idea harden in our grasp or grow coarse from handling. For this reason (and not for the sake of petty mystification) Hawthorne will not disclose the one physical trait which would have completed Donatello's resemblance to the Faun, the pointed, furry ears. The

## NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE

youth himself will jest with his friends on the subject, but no more ; the thick brown curls are never brushed aside.

So in Donatello's attachment to Miriam, the mysterious beauty of the story, there is something animal-like, at once pathetic and fierce. Love does not awaken the intellect, however ; the youth remains a child until the wrathful moment when he holds the mad Capuchin, Miriam's persecutor, over the edge of the precipice, and reads in the girl's consenting eyes approval of the deed he is about to commit. At this point Donatello's real life begins.

The crime is far-reaching in its consequences, blighting for weary months the happiness of the gentle Hilda, a terrified eye-witness ; but is most sinister in its effect on Donatello, whose dumb agony and remorse Hawthorne has painted with a strong but subdued touch. Perhaps the most striking of the incidents at Monte Beni is that where the wretched Donatello tries to call the wild creatures of the wood to him as he had been used to do in the days of his innocence, and finds his power gone, only some loathsome reptile coming at his bidding.

Hilda is one of the triumphs of Hawthorne's art. By what necromancy did he contrive to invest a character so ethereal with life and interest ? For the type is by no means one that invariably attracts, and the mere symbolism of the shrine,

## THE MARBLE FAUN

the doves, together with an innocence which carries its own safeguard, might have been used unsuccessfully a thousand times before being wrought by Hawthorne's subtile power into enduring form.

Kenyon is a proof of the instinct Hawthorne had for avoiding the realistic fact. One would fancy this a character which would take on realism of its own accord, a character which could be depended on to become human and bohemian, to smoke, swear, tell emphatic stories, and yet be gentle and high-minded withal, like Bret Harte's angel-miners. But Kenyon is almost as shadowy as Hilda.

Miriam with her rich dark beauty (making her in contrast with Hilda as Night to Day) is the one strong human character, capable of infinite pity and infinite devotion, a woman to die for — if the need were, and such need is not uncommon in romances. The shadow of a nameless crime hangs over her, from which, though innocent, she cannot escape. She has warned Donatello of the fatality that attends her. She holds his love in esteem so light as to be almost contempt until the moment when he shows the force to grapple with her enemy; then love flames up in her own heart. For her Donatello stains his hands with blood, suffers agony indescribable, and then 'comes back to his 'original self, with an inestimable treasure of improvement won from an experience of pain.' And as Miriam contemplates him on the day be-



## NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE

fore he gives himself up to justice, she asks whether the story of the fall of man has not been repeated in the romance of Monte Beni.

The deficiencies and excesses of *The Marble Faun* have been often pointed out. The superabundance of guide-book description which disturbed Sir Leslie Stephen was noted by Hawthorne as a defect and apologized for in the preface. It is astonishing how it fits into place when, after an interval of several years, one comes to re-read the story. *The Marble Faun* is a magical piece of work, its very enigmas, mysteries, and its inconclusiveness tending to heighten the effect. And it does not in the least detract from the enjoyment that one cannot follow the author to the extent of believing it his best work.

## VI

### LATEST AND POSTHUMOUS WRITINGS

#### OUR OLD HOME, NOTE-BOOKS, DOLLIVER ROMANCE

*Our Old Home* is a volume of twelve chapters on English life and experiences. Acute, frank, sympathetic, modestly phrased, abounding in humor, it may fairly be accounted one of the best of Hawthorne's works. The English are said to have been disturbed by a number of the comments on their



## OUR OLD HOME

character and manners. If so, they must be as touchy as Americans. *Our Old Home* contains nothing that should offend, unless indeed it be an offence to speak of one's neighbor in any terms not those of unmitigated eulogy. Hawthorne noted certain differences between the national types of the two countries and gave an account of them. But of any disposition to laud his own people at the expense of their British cousins, the book contains not a trace.

*Passages from the English Note-Books of Nathaniel Hawthorne* is the raw material out of which was fashioned such a charming and perfect literary study as *Our Old Home*. It is idle to dispute over the question whether the fragmentary journalizings of an eminent author should or should not be given to the public. They will always be given to the public, and the public will always be grateful for them, even though it has no deeper cause for gratitude than that involved in satisfaction of mere curiosity. At all events, the passion for looking into the work-shop of a great artist cannot be overcome. Perhaps this most trivial form of hero-worship deserves countenance.

The *Note-Books* (English, Italian, and American) bear the same relation to *Our Old Home* that a man talking with his most trusted friend bears to that same man when talking with an agreeable chance acquaintance. In the one case he is wholly unguarded, in the other he keeps himself in check

## NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE

even at the moment he seems most frank and expansive.

*The Dolliver Romance* is one of a group of studies for an elaborate narrative in which Hawthorne proposed to trace the fortunes of an American family back to those of its English forebears. The idea of connecting the obscure New England branch of the house with the proud Old-World descendants by some vague claim on the ancestral estate is almost too common in fiction. But Hawthorne seems to have been drawn towards it by his life in the consulate at Liverpool, where he had continually to check the exuberance of misguided fellow-countrymen who had appropriated, in mind, not a few of the finest estates in England, and only lacked faint encouragement to attempt entering on actual possession.

The idea of the Bloody Footstep was taken from a tradition connected with Smithell's Hall in Bolton-le-Moors, and Hawthorne went to see what purported to be the mark made in the stone step by the unhappy man about whose mysterious history the romance gathers. The quest and discovery of an elixir of life is in itself a threadbare motive, but could hardly have been commonplace under Hawthorne's treatment.

He was not to complete his design. The four versions of the story, *The Dolliver Romance*, *The Ancestral Footstep*, *Septimius Felton*, and *Doctor Grimsbawe's Secret*, furnish another glimpse into

## CONCLUSION

Hawthorne's literary studio, though we are warned not to infer that he always worked in the way the existence of these fragments might suggest.

Hawthorne was the most gifted of our American romancers. In a certain sense his field was a narrow one, but the soil was rich, and there was magic in his husbandry. He himself once declared that he never knew what patriotism was until he met an Englishman; that he was not an American, New England was as big a lump of earth as he could hold in his heart. The defect (if indeed it be a defect) was one of the sources of his power. Hawthorne did indeed love New England, but to suppose that he loved it with a blind and uncritical love is wholly to misunderstand both the man and his work. He was the genius of his little world. He knew its poetry and its prose, its mystery, charm, beauty, and its repellent and sordid features. New England will have no profounder interpreter, though it may be that as the superficial characteristics of the people change, his transcripts of life will increasingly take on the qualities of pure romance.



XI

*Henry David Thoreau*





# Henry David Thoreau

## I

### HIS LIFE

**P**HILIPPE THOREAU, of the parish of Saint Helier in the Isle of Jersey, had a son John who emigrated to America and opened a store on the Long Wharf in Boston. He married Jane Burns, daughter of a well-to-do Scotchman from the neighborhood of Sterling. John's son John, a lead-pencil maker of Concord, Massachusetts, married Cynthia Dunbar, daughter of the Reverend Asa Dunbar, of Keene, New Hampshire. Of their four children Henry David Thoreau, the author of *Walden*, was the third. He was born at Concord on July 12, 1817.

After his graduation at Harvard in the Class of 1837, Thoreau taught school, learned surveying and the art of making lead-pencils, and began writ-

R. W. Emerson: 'Thoreau' in the 'Atlantic Monthly,' August, 1862.

W. E. Channing: *Thoreau: the Poet Naturalist*, 1873.

F. B. Sanborn: *Thoreau*, 'American Men of Letters,' 1882.

A. S. Salt: *Thoreau*, 'Great Writers,' 1896.

## HENRY DAVID THOREAU

ing and lecturing. The episode in his life which gave him more than a local reputation was his camping out by the shore of Walden Pond. He spent two years and two months there studying how 'to live deliberately.' His hut, built by himself, might have seemed bare and cheerless to a victim of civilization. There was no carpet on the floor, no curtain at the window. Every superfluity was stripped off and life 'driven into a corner' in the hope of discovering what it was made of. Thoreau sturdily resisted the efforts of friends and neighbors to burden him with trumpery, refusing the gift of a door-mat on the plea that it was 'best to 'avoid the beginnings of evil,' and throwing a paper-weight out of the window 'because it had 'to be dusted every day.'

He raised his own vegetables in a patch of ground near by, made his own bread, and spent his leisure time in recording his observations of nature and in writing his first book, *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers*. When he was satisfied with this taste of life 'reduced to its lowest 'terms,' he went back to civilization.

*A Week on the Concord and Merrimack* was a failure, as publishers say; meaning that it did not sell. Having published at his own expense, Thoreau was financially embarrassed when seven hundred and fifty copies of an edition of a thousand came back on his hands. He said to a friend: 'I have 'added several hundred volumes to my library

## THOREAU'S LIFE

'lately, all of my own composition.' <sup>1</sup> His second venture, *Walden*, was more fortunate. He printed a few articles in the 'Boston Miscellany,' 'Putnam's Magazine,' the 'New York Tribune,' 'Graham's Magazine,' and the 'Atlantic Monthly,' but at no time could he be said to live by literature.

His income from his lectures must have been small, and apparently he made no effort to obtain engagements. He had an exalted idea of what constitutes a good lecture, and was suspicious of oratory. He told his English acquaintance Cholmondeley that he was from time to time congratulating himself on his 'general want of success as a lecturer. . . . I do my work clean as I go along, and they will not be likely to want me anywhere again.'

When Hawthorne was corresponding secretary of the Salem Lyceum, he invited Thoreau in behalf of the managers to give them a lecture. The invitation was accepted. The lecture must have had the fatal defect of being 'interesting,' for Thoreau was asked to speak before the Lyceum a second time the same winter.

Thoreau was a radical Abolitionist and for six years refused to pay his poll-tax, on the ground that the tax went indirectly to the support of slavery. For this delinquency he was once lodged in the town-jail over night. In 1857 he made the acquaintance of 'one John Brown' as a Southern-

<sup>1</sup> F. B. Sanborn: *The Personality of Thoreau*, p. 30.

## HENRY DAVID THOREAU

born president of a Northern college naïvely describes that terrible old man. When two years later news came of the desperate attempt at Harper's Ferry, Thoreau gave in a church vestry at Concord his impassioned 'Plea for Captain John Brown,' which one of his admirers regards as the most significant of his utterances.

Of the twelve volumes forming his collected writings two only were seen by Thoreau in book form. The remaining ten have been made up of reprinted magazine articles or selections from journals and letters. The list is as follows: *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers*, 1849; *Walden; or, Life in the Woods*, 1854; *Excursions* (edited by R. W. Emerson and Sophia Thoreau), 1863; *The Maine Woods*, 1864; *Cape Cod*, 1865; *Letters to Various Persons* [with Poems], 1865; *A Yankee in Canada, with Anti-Slavery and Reform Papers*, 1866; *Early Spring in Massachusetts*, 1881; *Summer*, 1884; *Winter*, 1888; *Autumn*, 1892; *Miscellanies*, 1894; *Familiar Letters of Henry David Thoreau*, 1894.

Thoreau 'travelled widely' in Concord and made a few trips elsewhere. Aside from his excursions to the Maine woods, the White Mountains, Cape Cod, and Staten Island, he took no long journey until 1861, when he went as far west as Minnesota. He was in ill health then, and a violent cold terminating in pulmonary consumption brought about his death (May 6, 1862). It

## THOREAU'S CHARACTER

has been often mentioned as a strange fact that this man who almost symbolized the out-of-door existence, who chanted its praises, and who was unhappy unless he had at least 'four hours a day 'in the woods and fields,' should have died, at the age of forty-five, of exposure to the elements which (according to his whimsical philosophy) were more friendly than man.

## II

### THOREAU'S CHARACTER

WITHOUT posing, Thoreau contrived somehow to gain the reputation of a poseur. Because his nose was more Emersonian than Emerson's, because he lived for a time at Emerson's house (where he was beloved by every member of the family), and because he affected the Orphic and seer-like mode of expression, he was called an imitator. Because he was a recluse and a stoic, and because his letters were edited in a way to emphasize his stoicism, he has been thought to lack the human and friendly qualities.

The charge of imitation has been refuted by those who knew him best. 'Doubtless his growth 'was stimulated by kindred ideas. This is all that 'can be granted. Utter independence, strong individuality distinguished him. His one foible



## HENRY DAVID THOREAU

‘was, not subserviency, but combativeness, mainly  
‘from mere love of fence when he found a worthy  
‘adversary, as his best friends knew almost too  
‘well.’<sup>1</sup>

In many ways Thoreau was much like other men. He was a devoted son, a brotherly brother, a helpful neighbor, a genial companion. We have his own word for it that he could out-sit the longest sitter in the village tap-room if there were occasion.

On the other hand, he was not ‘approachable’ in the common meaning of the word. He puzzled many people. He could be angular, stiff, remote, encrusted. Howells saw him in 1860, ‘a quaint ‘stump figure of a man.’<sup>2</sup> He sat on one side of the room, having first placed his visitor in a chair on the other side. It was more difficult to get near him spiritually than physically. He seemed almost unconscious of his caller’s presence.

Emerson edited Thoreau’s letters so as to present ‘a most perfect piece of stoicism.’ It was the side of his friend’s character in which he most rejoiced. The book should be read exactly as Emerson intended it to be read. Later it should be supplemented by the *Familiar Letters*, which brings into relief the affectionate and winning side of Thoreau’s character.

<sup>1</sup> Edward W. Emerson in the ‘Centenary’ Emerson, vol. x, p. 607.

<sup>2</sup> *Literary Friends and Acquaintance*, p. 59.



## THOREAU THE WRITER

### III

#### THE WRITER

THOREAU was a painstaking student of the art of expression, but never for its own sake, always as a means to an end. One may conclude that it was not mere author's vanity which led him to resent editorial tampering with his manuscript. He had good reasons for believing that neither Curtis of 'Putnam's' nor Lowell of 'The Atlantic' could change his text to advantage. The question was not one of mere nicety of phrase, but of that subtle quality of style due to the inextricable interweaving of the thought and the language in which the thought is expressed.

An out-of-doors writer, Thoreau's power to produce was in direct ratio of his intercourse with Nature. If shut up in the house he could not write at all. When he walked he stored up literary virtue. He believed that nothing was so good for the man of letters as work with the hands. It cleared the style of 'palaver and sentimentality.'

The fresh wild beauty of Thoreau's style (when he is at his best) may be praised without reserve. There is no danger of exaggerating its perfect novelty and attractiveness; the danger is that we may take the hint of these qualities for the reality. Thoreau could be commonplace when he chose.

IV

THE BOOKS

EARLY in September, 1839, the Thoreau brothers, John and Henry, made a voyage down the Concord and Merrimac rivers. The boat used was of their own building. It was painted blue and green, had wheels by which it could be dragged around the dams, and must have been as ugly as it was useful. *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack* records the unadventurous adventures of the two young men both on this and other excursions.

It is a medley of prose and verse, of homely common-sense and lofty speculation. Side by side with realistic portraits of plain people, farmers, fishermen, boatmen, and lock-keepers, are minute and exquisite descriptions of the life of field, mountain, stream, lake, and air. The literary allusions are many, and taken from sources as wide apart as the poles, Shattuck (the historian of Concord) and Anacreon, Gookin and Chaucer. Here is to be found the famous essay on Friendship, the spirit of which may be partly divined from this sentence: 'I could tame a hyena more easily than my friend.'

The poetry in the volume is a stumbling-block to not a few readers. Doubtless it has its virtues, but too often Thoreau's poetry must be forgiven

## THOREAU'S BOOKS

for the sake of his prose. The stiff, almost self-conscious air of *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack* and the hobbling verse help to explain the indifference of the author's contemporaries to a very original work.

*Walden*, the second of Thoreau's books, is the better of the two, which does not mean that the first could be spared. The style is easier, the flavor more racy, the spirit more humorous. The attitude of the writer is characteristically provoking and pugnacious. The chapters abound in audacities which at once pique and delight the reader. This modern Diogenes-Crusoe, solving the problem of existence on an improvised desert-island two miles from his mother's door-step, is a refreshing figure.

Life in the woods fascinated Thoreau. *Walden* is a tribute to this fascination. In the absence of domestic sounds he had the murmur of the forest, the cry of the loon, the 'trunk' of the frog, and the clangor of the wild-goose. Society was plenty and of the best. His neighbors were the squirrel, the field-mouse, the phœbe, the blue jay. Human companionship was not wanting, for there were visitors of all sorts, from the half-witted to those who had more wits than they knew what to do with. Matter-of-fact people were amazed at the young man's way of living, lacking the penetration to see that he might live as he did from the humor of it. When sceptics asked him whether he

thought he could subsist on vegetable food alone, Thoreau, to strike at the root of the matter at once, was accustomed to say that he 'could live on board 'nails.' 'If they cannot understand that they cannot understand much that I say.'

The Walden episode was an experiment in emancipation, and the book is a challenge to mankind to live more simply and freely. Thoreau mocks at the worship of luxury. 'I would rather sit on a pumpkin and have it all to myself than be crowded on a velvet cushion. I would rather ride on earth in an ox-cart, with a free circulation, than go to heaven in the fancy car of an excursion train and breathe a malaria all the way.'

*Excursions* is a collection of nine essays. Some of them are formal and scientific with the Thoreau-esque flavor ('Natural History of Massachusetts,' 'The Succession of Forest Trees,' 'Autumnal Tints,' 'Wild Apples'), others are pure Thoreau ('A Walk to Wachusett,' 'The Landlord,' 'A Winter Walk,' 'Walking,' 'Night and Moonlight'). The flavor of these 'wildlings of literature,' as a devotee happily calls them, is as marked almost as that of *Walden*. They are, in fact, *Walden* in miniature.

*The Maine Woods* consists of three long essays, 'Ktaadn,' 'Chesuncook,' and 'The Allegash and East Branch.' They are readable, informing, uninspired. In the degree in which he left himself out of his pages Thoreau became as tame and con-

## THOREAU'S BOOKS

ventional as the most academic of writers. The strength of some men of letters lies in conformity. Thoreau is strongest in non-conformity.

*Cape Cod* is far more characteristic than the *Maine Woods*. He who likes the savor of salt and the tonic of ocean air will enjoy this book whether he cares for Thoreau or not. It is interesting as an early contribution to the history of Cape Cod folks by a historian who was more of an enigma to the natives than they were to him.

The best part of *A Yankee in Canada* is not to be found in the account of the excursion to Montreal and Quebec, but in the sheaf of anti-slavery and reform papers bound up in the same volume. Here are printed the address on 'Slavery in Massachusetts,' the paper on 'Civil Disobedience,' containing the lively account of the author's experience in Concord jail, the two addresses on John Brown, the essay on 'Life without Principle,' and the critical study of 'Thomas Carlyle and his Works.'

The four volumes named for the seasons are valuable for the light they shed on Thoreau's method as a writer, and his skill and accuracy in reporting the facts of Nature. They are sure to be read by the faithful, because the genuine Thoreau enthusiast can read his every line. The rest of the world will be content to know him by two or three of the twelve volumes bearing his name. *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers*,



## HENRY DAVID THOREAU

*Walden*, the *Familiar Letters*, and a few essays from *Excursions* and the Anti-Slavery papers ought to be sufficient.

No more than greater men of letters can Thoreau be disposed of in a paragraph. Some of his pronounced characteristics can be, however.

He was a paradoxical philosopher. To praise Nature at the expense of civilized society, to eulogize the 'perfection' of the one and lament the degradation of the other, to declare solemnly that church spires deform the landscape, and that it is a mistake to do a second time what has been done once, — these declarations give a wholly incomplete but, so far as they go, not unjust idea of his manner. Taking Thoreau literally is a capital way to breed a dislike for him. Grant him his own manner of expressing his thought, make no effort to exact conformity from so wayward a genius, and at once you are, as Walt Whitman would say, 'rapport' with him. It is easy to exaggerate his paradoxicalness. Say to yourself as you take up the volume: 'Now let us find out just how whimsical this fellow can be,' and straightway he disappoints by not being whimsical at all.

If Thoreau's praise of Nature at the expense of Society seems to border on the absurd, one must bear in mind how complete and intimate was his knowledge of what he praised. His love of forest, lake, hill, and mountain, of beast and bird, was



## CONCLUSION

deep, passionate, unremitting. He speaks somewhere of an old man so versed in Nature's ways that apparently 'there were no secrets between 'them.' This might have been said of Thoreau himself. He could pay lofty tributes to the 'mystical' quality in Nature; but he was not a mere rhapsodist, a petty village Chateaubriand; he could come straight down to tangible facts and recount every detail of the advent of spring at Walden. His power to see and his skill in describing the thing seen unite to give the very atmosphere of life in the woods.

He was himself so complete an original and his literary attractiveness is such that Thoreau numbers among his best friends not only those who are nature-blind but the confirmed city-men as well, the frequenters of clubs, the lovers of pavements and crowds. That some of the most appreciative tributes to his genius should have come from these is but one paradox the more in the history of him who (at times) delighted above all else in the paradoxical.



XII

*Oliver Wendell Holmes*



# *Oliver Wendell Holmes*

## I

### HIS LIFE

HOLMES invented a phrase which became celebrated — ‘the Brahmin caste of New England,’ that is to say, an aristocracy of culture. The inventor of the phrase belonged to the class. He was a son of the Reverend Abiel Holmes, minister of the First Church of Cambridge and author of that ‘painstaking and careful work,’ the *American Annals*.

Abiel Holmes (a great-grandson of John Holmes, one of the settlers of Woodstock, Connecticut) was twice married. His first wife was Mary Stiles, daughter of President Ezra Stiles of Yale College. Five years after her death he married Sarah Wendell of Boston, who became the mother of Oliver Wendell Holmes. Through the Wendells, Holmes was related by one line of descent to Anne Bradstreet; by another to Evert Jansen Wendell of Albany.

W. Sloane Kennedy: *Oliver Wendell Holmes*, 1883.

J. T. Morse, Jr.: *Life and Letters of Oliver Wendell Holmes*, 1896.

## OLIVER WENDELL HOLMES

The author of *The Autocrat of the Breakfast-Table* was born at Cambridge, Massachusetts, on Harvard Commencement Day, August 29, 1809. After a preliminary training at the Cambridgeport Academy (where he had for schoolmates Margaret Fuller and Richard Henry Dana) Holmes completed his college preparation at Phillips Academy, Andover, entered Harvard in the class of 1829, and in due time was graduated.

He had, or thought he had, an inclination to carry the 'green bag,' and to this end spent a year at the Dane (now Harvard) Law School, in Cambridge. He soon discovered a greater inclination towards medicine and entered the private medical school of Doctor James Jackson, in Boston. In 1833 he became a student at the École de Médecine in Paris, and during two busy winters heard the lectures of Broussais, Andral, Louis, and other teachers.

In 1836 he began the practice of medicine in Boston. During the two following years he competed for and won four of the Boylston Prizes. Enthusiastic in his profession, he found the life of a general practitioner not to his liking, and when, in 1838, the professorship of anatomy and physiology at Dartmouth College was offered him, he was 'mightily pleased.' He held the position for two years (1839-40); residence at Hanover was required for three months of each year.

Some time before going to Hanover, Holmes



## HOLMES'S LIFE

was writing to his friend Phineas Barnes, congratulating him on having entered into 'the beatific 'state of duality,' and wishing himself in like case. 'I have flirted and written poetry long enough,' he said, 'and I feel that I am growing domestic 'and tabby-ish.' On June 15, 1840, he married Miss Amelia Jackson, a daughter of Judge Charles Jackson of Boston. She was a young woman of rare endowments. 'Every estimable and attractive 'quality of mind and character seemed to be hers.'<sup>1</sup>

In 1847 Holmes was appointed Parkman professor of anatomy and physiology in the Harvard Medical School. The multifarious extra cares involved led him to say that in those early days he occupied not a chair in the college but a settee. He held the position for thirty-five consecutive years.

The reputation which Holmes began early to build up through his writings was partly literary, partly scientific, partly a compound of both. Lovers of well-turned and witty verse knew him through his *Poems* (1836) and his metrical essays, *Urania* (1846) and *Astræa* (1850). The public, always solicitous about its health, heard or read the two lectures on *Homæopathy and its kindred Delusions* (1842). Physicians made his acquaintance through the *Boylston Prize Dissertations* (1836-37), and the *Essay on the Contagiousness of Puerperal Fever* (1843).

<sup>1</sup> J. T. Morse, Jr.

## OLIVER WENDELL HOLMES

Fame came to Holmes in 1857 when he began printing in the newly founded 'Atlantic Monthly' a series of papers entitled *The Autocrat of the Breakfast-Table*. Reprinted as a book, it at once took its proper place as an American classic, and now after forty-eight years its popularity seems in no degree lessened.

The following list contains the principal works upon which Holmes's reputation as a man of letters rests. A full bibliography must be consulted if one would know the extent of his literary and scientific activity: *The Autocrat of the Breakfast-Table*, 1858; *The Professor at the Breakfast-Table*, 1860; *Currents and Counter-Currents, with Other Addresses*, 1861; *Elsie Venner*, 1861; *Songs in Many Keys*, 1862; *Soundings from the Atlantic*, 1864; *The Guardian Angel*, 1867; *The Poet at the Breakfast-Table*, 1872; *Songs of Many Seasons*, 1875; *Memoir of John Lothrop Motley*, 1879; *The Iron Gate and Other Poems*, 1880; *Pages from an Old Volume of Life*, 1883; *A Mortal Antipathy*, 1885; *Ralph Waldo Emerson*, 1885; *Our Hundred Days in Europe*, 1887; *Before the Curfew and Other Poems*, 1888; *Over the Teacups*, 1891.

Holmes's life was without marked incident. His work at the Medical School, his public lectures, social engagements, the normal and agreeable responsibilities of home and society, filled the measure of his days. The visit to England in 1886, when he was made a D. C. L. by Oxford, a Litt. D.

## *HIS CHARACTER*

by Cambridge, and an LL. D. by Edinburgh, was something like apotheosis, if the term be not too extravagant.

He endured the evils consequent on old age with philosophic composure, and it became at the last a matter of scientific curiosity with him to see how long he could maintain life. He was spared a tedious illness, and died an almost painless death on October 7, 1894.

## II

### THE MAN

AMONG the 'Autocrat's' distinguishing traits was humanity. He has recorded the feeling of 'awe-stricken sympathy' at first sight of the white faces of the sick in the hospital wards. 'The dreadful scenes in the operating theatre—for this was before the days of ether—were a great shock to my sensibilities.' His nerves hardened in time, but he was always keenly alive to human suffering. There is a note of contempt in his reference to Lisfranc, the surgeon, who 'regretted the splendid guardsmen of the Empire because they had such magnificent thighs to amputate.'

It was once said of Holmes that he was difficult to catch unless he were wanted for some kind act. He lost no opportunity to give happiness. In old

## OLIVER WENDELL HOLMES

age when flattery was tedious, and blindness imminent, and the autograph hunter had become a burden, he patiently wrote his name and transcribed stanzas of 'Dorothy Q.' or 'The Last Leaf' for admirers from all parts of the earth. This was the smallest tax on his good nature. For years he had been expected to act as counsel and sometimes as literary agent for all the minor poets of America. Many of these innocents conceived Holmes as automatically issuing certificates to the virtue of their work. He was always kind and invariably plain-spoken. To the author of an epic he wrote: 'I cannot conscientiously advise you 'to print your poem; it will be an expense to you, 'and the gain to your reputation will not be an 'equivalent.'

Holmes believed in the humanizing influences of good blood, social position, and wealth. It was no small matter, he thought, to have a descent from men who had played their parts acceptably in the drama of life. He preferred the man with the 'family portraits' to the man with the 'twenty-cent daguerreotype' unless he had reason to believe that the latter was the better man of the two. His amusing poem, 'Contentment,' is not a jest, but a plain statement of his philosophy.

Open-minded in literary and scientific matters, he was delightfully conservative about places. He respected the country and loved the town. A city man, he was also a man of one city. He

## *HIS CHARACTER*

professed to have been the discoverer of Myrtle Street, the abode of 'peace and beauty, and virtue, and serene old age.' Thus it looked to him as he explored its 'western extremity of sunny courts and passages.' Holmes's books contain many proofs of his cat-like attachment to city nooks and corners, his liking for odd streets, unexpected turns, and winding ways. 'I have bored this ancient city through and through, until I know it as an old inhabitant of a Cheshire knows his cheese.'

Holmes enjoyed above all the sense of an undisturbed possession of things. He complained of the march of modern improvement only when he found himself improved out of one house and driven to take refuge in another. He thought that a wretched state of affairs whereby a man was compelled to move every twenty or thirty years.

With his sunny nature Holmes found it difficult to be a good hater. He had but two violent antipathies, Calvinism and homœopathy. On these he concentrated the little measure of asperity he possessed, together with a large measure of vigorous logic and frank contempt.



III

THE WRITER

IN his characteristic prose style Holmes is easy, familiar, off-hand, in short, conversational. He may have spent hours over his paragraphs, but with their air of unpremeditation they give no sign of it. The manner of his prose is well-bred but non-chalant. Yet there is always a note of reserve. The Autocrat is less familiar than he seems.

The conversational style permits abrupt turns, sudden transitions, a pleasant negligence. It also has narrow limits; it cannot rise to eloquence, and fine writing is apt to seem out of place. Holmes knew pretty accurately the limits of his instrument.

Like other practised writers, he varied his style to fit his subject. And while a certain winsomeness is never wanting, it is less apparent in the novels than in the 'Breakfast-Table' books, and in the biographies than in the novels. Often he becomes business-like, extremely matter of fact, clearly determined to make his point or to solve his problem without waste of words or superfluous ornament.

With respect to his verse we have been told that Holmes was a 'consummate master of all that 'is harmonious, graceful, and pleasing in rhythm 'and in language.' Had the eulogist been speak-



## THE WRITER

ing of Tennyson, or Swinburne, or Shelley, he could have said little more. Holmes's verse is neat, precise, felicitous, often graceful, unmistakably clever, abounding in pointed phrase and happy rhyme, but taken as a whole it must be adjudged the poetry of a cultivated gentleman and a wit rather than the poetry of a poet.

Much of it has a distinctly old-fashioned air, contrasting oddly with the freshness and 'modernity' of the poet's prose. In his own phrase Holmes 'was trained after the schools of classical English verse as represented by Pope, Goldsmith, and 'Campbell.' The metrical essays (*Poetry, Astræa, Urania*) show how strong was the Eighteenth-century influence. The choice of metre cannot be questioned. If audiences will have poetic dissertations, they probably suffer least under the heroic couplet. It is easy to comprehend, and not difficult to write; and the form of the verse tempts to cleverness.

### IV

#### THE AUTOCRAT AND ITS COMPANIONS, OVER THE TEACUPS, OUR HUNDRED DAYS IN EUROPE

THE motto, 'Every man his own Boswell,' on the title-page of *The Autocrat of the Breakfast-Table*, is a key to the book. The conceit has merits be-

sides that of novelty. There is a world of humorous suggestion in the idea of 'doubling' the parts of philosophic wit and worshipping reporter.

The scene is a Boston boarding-house with its more or less commonplace people, the landlady, her daughter, her son Benjamin Franklin, the young fellow called John, the old gentleman who sits opposite, the poor relation, the divinity student, the schoolmistress, and the Autocrat himself. They talk, listen, jest, laugh. Little by little the commonplace characters grow attractive. Pleasant and lovable traits come to light. There is pathos, sentiment, a deal of mirth, but little action. The Autocrat marries the schoolmistress towards the close of the book. So much likeness is there to an old-fashioned love story, and no more.

In general the characters interest less for what they say than for what they prompt the Autocrat to say. He says many things, and all so wise, so entertaining, so clever. When Holmes threw off these sparkling paragraphs month by month, he could have had little idea what the index would reveal. He glances from subject to subject, touching lightly here and lightly there. Poetry, pugilism, horse-racing, theology, and tree-lore are all equally interesting to him and to us. The reader is not too long detained by any one thing. An infinite number of topics are handled with effervescent gayety in a manner sometimes called 'French.' Holmes accused Emerson of want of logical se-

## THE AUTOCRAT

quence. That was a master stroke. Open a volume of the Breakfast-Table series at random and you chance on the oddest combinations of subjects, as when a paragraph on insanity is followed by a paragraph on private theatricals — perhaps a less illogical juxtaposition than at first sight appears. Waywardness and inconsequence are among the principal charms of *The Autocrat of the Breakfast-Table*.

That a book so distinctively local in atmosphere and allusion should have attained at once and kept to this day widespread popularity is a little surprising. For local it is — provincial, as New Yorkers would say. At all events, it is Bostonian to the last degree. The little city, compact and picturesque, was not merely the background, the scene of the breakfast-table episodes and conversations; the entire volume is saturated with the atmosphere of Boston. To Holmes it was the one city worth while, the city whose State House was Hub of the Solar System. By his testimony (and who should know better?) you could not pry that out of a Boston man if you had the tire of all creation straightened out for a crowbar.

The *Autocrat* was followed by the *Professor* and the *Poet*. The critical history of sequels is well known. Seldom a complete failure, they are rarely an unqualified success. Yet it is not easy to see wherein *The Professor at the Breakfast-Table* falls much below *The Autocrat*. The book would be

justified were it only for the pathetic figure of Little Boston, to say nothing of Iris, the young Marylander, the Model of all the Virtues, and the Koh-i-noor. It is something, too, to have seen the landlady's daughter appropriately wedded to an undertaker, and the young fellow called John also married, and in possession of 'one of them little 'articles' for which he had longed in the days of bachelorhood, to wit, a boy of his own.

*The Poet at the Breakfast-Table*, a storehouse of delightful inventions, proved the least attractive of the three to the public. But all of Holmes's old-time skill returned when he wrote *Over the Teacups*, his last book. The framework is simple but attractive, the characters have genuine vitality and pique the reader by suggesting that they must have been drawn from life. The Dictator is an old friend. Number Five, the Tutor, the Counsellor, the two Annexes, Number Seven, the Mistress and Delilah are agreeable acquaintances, and the misfortune is ours if we do not know them as well as the figures of *The Autocrat*.

All these books are personal, known as such, and deriving half their charm from the reader's ability to recognize Holmes himself under various disguises. In *Our Hundred Days in Europe* the author speaks *in propria persona*, and the volume may be described as a big printed letter addressed to the writer's friends, who, loving him as they do, will rejoice in his happiness and his triumphs.

## POETICAL WORK

### V

#### THE POET

THE Autocrat's poetical works contain a generous measure of what elderly bards call their 'juvenilia.' We all understand the term. It means verses which the bards in question would gladly have left in the solitude of old magazines, and which admirers insist on dragging into light, — poems that help to stock the school readers and speakers, and which, because the copyright has expired by the unjust law of the land, compilers of anthologies seize on and parade as representative.

That Holmes suffers but little by the persistence of his 'juvenilia' and 'early verses' is due to their frankly comic and grotesque character. The reader is spared faded sentiment, and he is heartily amused by the ingenuity of the conceits, the sparkle of the rhymes, the satire, the epigrammatic wit. There is mirth still in that brilliant essay in verbal gymnastics 'The Comet' (a dyspeptic's dream), in 'The September Gale' (a boy's lament for his Sunday breeches, blown from the line one fatal wash-day and never recovered), in 'The Spectre Pig' (a parody on Dana's 'Buccaneer'), in 'The Height of the Ridiculous,' 'Daily Trials,' 'The Treadmill Song,' 'The Dorchester Giant,'



OLIVER WENDELL HOLMES

‘The Music-Grinders,’ and the heartlessly funny poem entitled ‘My Aunt.’

Holmes was the readiest and the happiest of ‘occasional’ poets. No one was so apt as he in meeting the needs of the moment, in brightening with rhymed felicities the banquet, the class reunion, or in greeting the distinguished stranger. He had rare skill in fitting the word to the audience; it was impossible for him to be dull, and being good-humored, it was difficult for him to say ‘No’ when committees were importunate. Of his three hundred and twenty-seven poems, nearly one half are poems of occasion. He wrote the greeting to Charles Dickens, to the Prince Imperial, a poem for the Moore celebration, for the dedication of the Stratford Fountain, for the two hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the founding of Harvard College. His poems for the Class of 1829, forty-four in number, reflect the history of the times as well as the mood of the writer. The most famous of them is ‘The Boys’ (1859). Its motive, that boy-nature never quite dies in the man, and its defiant optimism were calculated to have rejuvenating effect on a group of classmates then thirty years out of college.

This art requires a quality of mind akin to that of the improvisatore. Holmes was Boston’s poet laureate. His power to put an idea into self-singing measure saved the battle-ship ‘Constitution,’ and did much to save the ‘Old South’ Church.



## POETICAL WORK

In his finer work there is a delicious blending of thoughtfulness and humorous fancy. Only Holmes could have given the lines on 'Dorothy 'Q.' their most original touch,—asking what would have been the result for *him* had prospective great-grandmother said 'No' instead of 'Yes':—

Should I be I, or would it be  
One tenth another to nine tenths me?

Half the pathos in that fragile and beautiful piece of workmanship, 'The Last Leaf,' derives from the humor, from the blending of laughter and tears. Even in the exquisite piece, attributed to Iris, 'Under the Violets,' a description of a young girl's burial-place, the lighter touch is not wholly wanting:—

When, turning round their dial-track,  
Eastward the lengthening shadows pass,  
Her little mourners, clad in black,  
The crickets, sliding through the grass,  
Shall pipe for her an evening mass.

His highest flights are represented by 'The Chambered Nautilus' and 'Musa,' by the quaint and fanciful 'Homesick in Heaven,' and by the simple and pathetic little lament entitled 'Martha.' His claim to the name of poet must rest on these, on his fine setting of the romance of Agnes Surriage, and on his tributes to Bryant and to Everett.

## VI

## FICTION AND BIOGRAPHY

HOLMES wrote three novels. Although readable, original, based on a thorough comprehension of the scenes described, the life, antecedents, prejudices, habits, and manners of the people portrayed, nevertheless they strike one as being experiments in fiction rather than true novels. They may be classed with similar attempts by J. G. Holland and Bayard Taylor. Each of these writers was a practised craftsman. The trained man of letters can write a volume which he, his friends, his publishers, the public, and many fair-minded critics agree in calling a novel. But the book in question does not become a novel from having been cast in the orthodox form. It resembles a novel more nearly than it resembles anything else, nevertheless it is not a veritable novel. Any reader can feel it, though he may not be able to say just where the difference lies, or how there happens to be a difference. Many a writer, it would seem, has only to continue his efforts to arrive finally at the making of a true novel. He falls short because his mind is working in an unwonted medium rather than because he lacks inventive ability.

If *Elsie Venner* and *The Guardian Angel* fail of being true novels, they are at least highly suc-

## ELSIE VENNER

cessful studies in fiction and have given and will continue to give a world of pleasure. If *A Mortal Antipathy* falls short of the excellence attained by the other two, it has at least the virtue of having been written by a man who could not be uninteresting, no matter what was his age or his humor.

*Elsie Venner* is a study in prenatal influences. The motive is gruesome enough. A young woman, bitten by a snake, transmits certain tendencies thus derived to her child. The subject was better adapted to Hawthorne's pen than to the Autocrat's. A man of science knows too much. Imagination is hampered. 'What is' and 'What might be' are in perpetual conflict. A poet (such as Hawthorne essentially was) throws science to the winds. Holmes goes at the problem in a brisk, business-like way. Hawthorne would have treated it as a mystery, not dragging it into broad light.

*Elsie Venner* was dramatized and staged. Holmes went to see it. What he thought of the play at the time is not recorded, but in after years he pronounced it 'bad, very bad.'

*The Guardian Angel* also deals with the question of heredity. The problem of how many of our ancestors come out in us, and just how they make themselves felt, was always fascinating to Holmes. There are no snakes in this story to account for Myrtle Hazard's peculiarities, but something quite as enigmatical, namely, an Indian. One character in *The Guardian Angel* has come near to achieving

immortality — Gifted Hopkins, the minor poet, whose name was an inspiration. He represents a harmless and much-abused race. The successful in his own craft are even more impatient with him than the mockers among the laity, probably because Gifted, in the innocence of his heart, desires to have his verses read, and sends them to eminent poets under the mistaken impression that they will be welcome. Holmes confessed that he had been hard on Gifted Hopkins.

The memoir of *John Lothrop Motley*, in addition to being a formal record of personal history and literary achievement, is a spirited defence of a proud, a gifted, and (in the biographer's opinion) an ill-used man, a man who, after years of successful public service, was needlessly and wantonly humbled and mortified. Hence the note of fine indignation which vibrates through the narrative.

The life of *Emerson* contributed by Holmes to the series of 'American Men of Letters' was a surprise to the public. To call for judgment on the most transcendental of New England authors by the least transcendental, to invite the poet of 'The One-Hoss Shay' to pronounce on the poet of 'The Sphinx,' seems an odd if not a humorous performance. Whoever suggested it did a wise thing, and the result of the suggestion was a useful and agreeable piece of biographical writing.

The work is thoroughly done, even to an analysis of the individual essays. Who will, may

## CONCLUSION

view Emerson through the Autocrat's eyes. They had a close bond in their liking for the tangible facts of life. 'Too much,' says Holmes, 'has been made of Emerson's mysticism. He was an intellectual rather than an emotional mystic, and withal a cautious one. He never let go the string of his balloon.'

That we read Holmes on Emerson less for the sake of Emerson than for the sake of Holmes suggests the possibility that we read all the Autocrat's books in the same spirit. Without question his work is of value in the degree in which it reveals its author. He could not be impersonal, he could not be dramatic. But he was fortunate in that he could always be himself. He was one of the most delightful of men. And being likewise one of the friendliest of writers he is most successful when the form of his books, like *The Autocrat* and *Over the Teacups*, permits him, as it were, to bring his easy chair into the centre of the room while we gather about him anxious to have him begin to talk, hoping that he will be in no haste to leave off.





XIII

*John Lothrop Motley*



# John Lothrop Motley

## I

### HIS LIFE

MOTLEY was born at Dorchester, Massachusetts, on April 15, 1814. His great-grandfather, John Motley, came from Belfast, Ireland, early in the Eighteenth Century, and settled at Falmouth, now Portland, Maine. His father, Thomas Motley, a prosperous merchant of Boston, married Anna Lothrop, daughter of the Reverend John Lothrop. The historian, the second-born of their eight children, was named in honor of his maternal grandfather.

After a course of study under Cogswell and Bancroft at the Round Hill School, Motley entered Harvard College and was graduated in 1831. He was noted both at Northampton and Cambridge for intellectual brilliancy rather than studiousness, for a regal manner which did not tend to make him universally popular, and for rare personal beauty as was becoming in a youth whose

O. W. Holmes : *John Lothrop Motley, a Memoir*, 1879.

G. W. Curtis (edited) : *The Correspondence of John Lothrop Motley*, D. C. L., 1889.

## JOHN LOTHROP MOTLEY

parents were reputed in their younger days 'the 'handsomest pair the town of Boston could show.' He was a wit. 'Give me the luxuries of life and 'I will dispense with the necessities,' is one of his best-known sayings. His passions were literary, he admired Shelley and enjoyed the cleverness of Praed. Although fond of versifying, he seems to have printed little or nothing.

After graduation Motley spent two years (1832-33) at German universities. He went first to Göttingen, where he made the acquaintance of Bismarck. They were fellow-students the next year at Berlin. 'We lived in closest intimacy, 'sharing meals and outdoor exercise,' said Bismarck in a letter to Holmes.

His period of foreign study having come to an end, Motley read law in Boston and was admitted to the bar. In 1837 he married Miss Mary Benjamin, a young woman noted for her beauty, cleverness, and an open-hearted sincerity which 'made her seem like a sister to those who could 'help becoming her lovers.'<sup>1</sup> Two years after his marriage Motley made his literary beginning by publishing a novel, *Morton's Hope, or the Memoirs of a Provincial*, and in 1849 he published yet another, *Merry-Mount, a Romance of the Massachusetts Colony*. Neither was successful. Perhaps the second failure was required to emphasize the lesson taught by the first, that the author's gifts were

<sup>1</sup> O. W. Holmes.

not for imaginative work.<sup>1</sup> He was more fortunate with a group of three essays printed in the 'North American Review,' one on 'Peter the Great' (1845), one on 'Balzac' (1847), the third on 'The Polity of the Puritans' (1849).

The first subject was suggested to Motley during a residence of several months in St. Petersburg as Secretary to the American Legation (1841-42). This taste of diplomatic life seems not to have been wholly relished. Motley's wife could not accompany him, and homesickness and a Russian winter conspired to drive him back to America. He gained some knowledge of practical politics by serving a term in the Massachusetts legislature (1849). Neither law, nor diplomacy, nor yet politics, seemed at that time to offer a field in which he could work to best advantage. More and more he was tending towards literature. So absorbed had he become in the history of Holland that he felt it 'necessary to write a book on the subject, 'even if it were destined to fall dead from the 'press.' He had made some progress when he heard of Prescott's projected history of Philip the

<sup>1</sup> *Merry-Mount* is more readable than its predecessor. Such characters as Sir Christopher Gardiner and his 'cousin,' Thomas Morton with his hawks and his classical quotations, Esther Ludlow and Maudsley, Walford the smith, Blaxton the hermit, together with the human grotesques Peter Cakebread, Bootefish, and Canary-Bird, repay one for the trouble he takes to make their acquaintance.

## JOHN LOTHROP MOTLEY

Second. Thinking it 'disloyal' not to declare his ambition of invading a part of Prescott's own domain, he went to lay his plan before the elder historian. Prescott immediately offered the use of books from his library and was in all ways cordial and enthusiastic.

It soon became evident that a history of Holland could not be written in America. In 1851 Motley took his family and went abroad, and for the next five years toiled unweariedly among the archives of Dresden, The Hague, Brussels, and Paris. His energy and plodding patience surprised the friends who remembered Motley for a brilliant young man who heretofore had played industriously at work rather than actually worked. 'He never shrank from any of the drudgery of 'preparation,' said his daughter, Lady Harcourt, in after years.

The three volumes of *The Rise of the Dutch Republic* were at length ready for the press. Motley was forced to publish at his own expense. Notwithstanding hostile criticisms, the success was undeniable. The book was immediately translated into French, German, and Dutch. Of two French versions the one published in Paris was edited, with an introduction, by Guizot.

The historical series as we have it comprises nine volumes. The works appeared in the following order: *The Rise of the Dutch Republic*, 1856; *History of the United Netherlands*, 1860-68; *The*



## MOTLEY'S LIFE

*Life and Death of John of Barneveld*, 1874. Motley's plan included a history of the Thirty Years' War. But he was not to be granted length of days sufficient for the writing of this 'last act of a great drama.'

Among many scholastic honors which in the nature of things fell to Motley's share may be mentioned the conferring of the degree of D. C. L. by Oxford, and the election to full membership in the Institute of France.

Shortly after the fall of Fort Sumter, Motley published in the London 'Times' two letters on the significance and justice of the war. They had a marked effect in England and were reprinted in America. In June, 1861, the Austrian government having refused to accept the minister sent to Vienna, Motley was accredited to the mission. After discharging the duties of his office with marked ability during the four troubled years of Lincoln's administration, and through two years of Johnson's, he resigned because of an affront offered him by his own government.<sup>1</sup>

During the political campaign of 1868 Motley gave an address in Music Hall, Boston, on 'Four Questions for the People at the Presidential Election.' On December 16, as orator at the sixty-first anniversary of the New York Historical Society,

<sup>1</sup> For a defence of the part played by the Secretary of State in this affair see John Bigelow's paper entitled 'Mr. Seward and Mr. Motley,' in the 'International Review,' July-August, 1878.

## JOHN LOTHROP MOTLEY

he spoke on 'Historic Progress and American Democracy.' In the spring of 1869 President Grant assigned Motley to the English mission, and in July, 1870, recalled him. The reasons given for this summary act have never been satisfactory to Motley's friends. It is a question for experts. If Motley's indiscretion (or offence) was great, his punishment was severe, and the manner of it not undeserving of the epithet brutal.<sup>1</sup>

Motley's health is believed to have been affected by distress of mind over the recall. But the real disaster of his latter years was the loss of his wife. He survived her only two and a half years. His death occurred at Kingston Russell, near Dorchester, England, on May 29, 1877.

Dean Stanley in his tribute to Motley at Westminster Abbey used the striking phrase, 'an historian at once so ardent and so laborious.' J. R. Green, who heard the sermon, thought the phrase 'most happy.' Said Green: 'I should have liked Stanley to have pointed out the thing which strikes me most in Motley, that alone of all men past and present he knit together not only America and England, but that Older England which we left on Frisian shores, and which grew into the United Netherlands. A child of America, the historian of Holland, he made England his adopted country, and in England his body lies.'

<sup>1</sup> John Jay: 'Motley's Appeal to History,' in the 'International Review' for November-December, 1877.

## MOTLEY'S CHARACTER

### II

#### HIS CHARACTER

MOTLEY's letters afford the best insight into his generous, affectionate, richly endowed, and manly nature. They mirror his complete happiness in the home circle, his chivalrous devotion to the woman of his choice, his loyalty to his friends, and his passionate love of native land. They do not show — nor was it intended by the editor that they should — his fiery impatience, his quick resentment, his sensitive pride, his occasional and pardonable bitterness.

A dominant trait of Motley's character was intensity of the patriotic sentiment. Much was required of a 'good American' who, living in Europe during the Civil War, frequented the circles Motley frequented — much in the way of tact, patience, and, above all, courage and hopefulness. Motley, who was far from being a placid, unreflecting optimist, had need of all his philosophy as he saw everywhere proofs of satisfaction in America's misfortune. He had not only to meet a frank antagonism which could be understood and dealt with, but a hostility which took the galling form of suave assurances that his country was positively going to the dogs, and on the whole it was a very good thing that it was. If

## JOHN LOTHROP MOTLEY

gentlemen did not exactly call on him for the purpose of telling him so, they managed sometimes to leave that impression. Motley's services to his country in meeting every form of attack, direct or insidious, in the spirit of high confidence, were very great. The extent of his usefulness has not yet been fully measured.

He was free from literary vanity and would have been quite unmoved had his books come short of their actual fortune. His way of accepting the real or the superficial tributes to success shows the man. Honorary degrees, elections to learned societies, drawing-room lionizing, passing compliments, were taken exactly for what they were worth. He was as far removed from the absurdity of being elated by these things as he was from the absurdity of pretending not to care. No one could have been more alive to the significance of a degree from Oxford, yet Motley seems to have got the most of comfort on that occasion from the odd spectacle of the Doctors marching in the rain, and among them old Brougham 'with his wonderful nose 'wagging lithely from side to side as he hitched 'up his red petticoats and stalked through the 'mud.'

The letters reveal so many pleasant traits as to make it difficult to comprehend the hostility which pursued the writer. Holmes throws a deal of light on that question by a single remark. Motley, he says, 'did not illustrate the popular type of politi-

## MOTLEY'S CHARACTER

'cian.' The fact is, he illustrated everything that was opposed to that type. An uncompromising upholder of the democratic theory, a bitter foe of absolutism, a eulogist of the people, Motley was himself an aristocrat to the finger-tips. 'He had 'a genuine horror of vulgarity in all its forms,' said one of his friends, and doubtless he showed it. An 'instinctive repugnance to bad manners 'and coarse-grained men' was a trait ill-suited to popularity. Motley's high-bred bearing alone constituted an offence. But he was incapable of so much policy as was involved in pretending to a bonhomie that was unnatural to him. He had a pliancy of nature fitted to the complex needs of a very complex social organization, but that was not enough to satisfy all his exacting countrymen. And among them were those who disliked him for being the gentleman he was.

### III

#### THE WRITER

THE historian of the Dutch Republic writes as one who thinks nobly, admires with enthusiasm, and hates without pettiness. 'His thoughts are masculine, full of argumentation,' and as are his thoughts so is his style. Often the language seems charged with his own energy and chivalric impul-



## JOHN LOTHROP MOTLEY

siveness. At such times the style is eager, mettlesome, impetuous, it glows with intensity of feeling.

Motley was not a 'fine' writer in the sense of being visibly scrupulous about the choice of words and the balance of sentences. He impresses one as of the opinion that a man can ill afford to give too much time to the problem of expression. But he is far from being indifferent to the reader. He is not merely willing, he prefers to please, provided that in so doing he is not diverted from his main purpose. The prevailing characteristics of his style are a natural dignity and a manly negligence.

He imparts vividness by means of detailed conversations among the actors of the historic drama. These colloquies have at times the air of being inventions of the historian, like the speeches in Xenophon. Conscious that a device intended to give reality might affect the sceptical mind quite otherwise, Motley more than once explained that 'no historical personage is ever made, in the text, 'to say or write anything, save what, on ample 'evidence, he is known to have said or written.'

The reader who turns from Prescott to Motley at once discovers that the younger historian weaves a dense, firm web. Appropriating an admirable figure invented by Henry James and used with respect to Balzac's style, it may be said that if Motley's work is not at every point cloth of gold, it has at least a metallic rigidity.



# THE DUTCH REPUBLIC

## IV

### THE HISTORIES

THE struggle of the Dutch for religious and political liberty was to have been 'only an episode' in Prescott's *Philip the Second*. Motley's broad treatment of the theme requires nine octavo volumes. *The Rise of the Dutch Republic* (in three volumes) covers the time between the abdication of Charles the Fifth and the murder of William of Orange. The *History of the United Netherlands* (in four volumes) takes up the narrative at the death of William and carries it on to the end of the Twelve Years' Truce. *John of Barneveld*, is 'the natural sequel' to the two preceding works, and 'a necessary introduction' to the history of the Thirty Years' War.

These works from first to last are marked by passionate admiration of the spirit which makes for liberty. Admitting the turbulent character of that spirit in the early history of the Netherlands, the historian does not deplore it. Sedition and uproar meant life. 'Those violent little commonwealths had blood in their veins! They were compact of proud, self-helping muscular vigor.' And to Motley 'the most sanguinary tumults which they ever enacted in the face of day were better than the order and silence born of the midnight darkness of despotism.'

## JOHN LOTHROP MOTLEY

The treatment then is strongly partisan. There is a fervor in the account of the deeds and sufferings of those patriots who thought no sacrifice too great if thereby the sum total of human liberty was increased.

Motley does not pretend that the leaders in this struggle were always disinterested. The motives swaying humanity are wondrously complex. But after all deductions are made, it was a struggle of light against darkness, and with such a struggle it was possible to sympathize unqualifiedly. There are cool-blooded critics who view such an attitude with disdain. This, they say, is not the temper in which history should be written. History must be calm, impartial, scientific. Perhaps the reasonable reply is that history must be of many sorts and the product of many types of mind; that one sort never really excludes the other. Also it is well to remember that a great historical master of our time,<sup>1</sup> and one whose creed was by no means narrow, pleaded always for this deep and passionate motive in the work, and laughed at the modern Oxford product which can balance questions but is able to accomplish nothing.

Motley's historic canvas is crowded with figures. The eye is at first drawn toward the personages, the military, ecclesiastical, and princely chiefs, William of Orange (who is Motley's hero), Egmont, Alva, and Granvelle; but the eye does not

<sup>1</sup> J. R. Green.

## THE DUTCH REPUBLIC

rest on these alone. Surrounding them are the multitudes of aspiring, suffering people becoming more and more a preponderant force in the life of the nation, refusing to be disposed of in the lump, or driven about like a flock of sheep to be sheared or slaughtered at the whim of a monarch.

Here lies Motley's sympathy. His indignation flames out when misery is brought upon thousands, by the caprice of kings or the selfishness of secular and ecclesiastical politicians. Note his sarcasm on the battle of Saint Quentin, a game in which 'the players were kings and the people were stakes — 'not parties.' Note his fine scorn of that type of government 'which was administered exclusively 'for the benefit of the government.' Note his loathing for that type of vanity which presumes to dictate how a man shall worship God. The temper in which Motley writes is admirably epitomized in the picture of Caraffa, as papal legate, making his entry into Paris, showering blessings upon the people, 'while the friends who were nearest him were aware that nothing but gibes and 'sarcasms were falling from his lips. . . . It would 'no doubt have increased the hilarity of Caraffa ' . . . could the idea have been suggested to his 'mind that the sentiments, or the welfare of the 'people throughout the great states . . . could 'have any possible bearing upon the question of 'peace or war. The world was governed by other 'influences. The wiles of a cardinal — the arts

‘of a concubine — the speculations of a soldier of  
 ‘fortune — the ill temper of a monk — the mutual  
 ‘venom of Italian houses — above all, the per-  
 ‘petual rivalry of the two great historical families  
 ‘who owned the greater part of Europe between  
 ‘them as their private property — such were the  
 ‘wheels on which rolled the destiny of Christen-  
 ‘dom. Compared to these, what were great moral  
 ‘and political ideas, the plans of statesmen, the  
 ‘hopes of nations? Time was to show. . . . Mean-  
 ‘while a petty war for petty motives was to precede  
 ‘the great spectacle which was to prove to Europe  
 ‘that principles and peoples still existed, and that  
 ‘a phlegmatic nation of merchants and manufac-  
 ‘turers could defy the powers of the universe, and  
 ‘risk all their blood and treasure, generation after  
 ‘generation, in a sacred cause.’<sup>1</sup>

The historian is a hard hitter. The enemies of liberty and their agents are not spared. Philip, Granvelle, Alva, and a score besides are characterized in withering terms. Of Philip, for example, Motley says: ‘It is curious to observe the minute  
 ‘reticulations of tyranny which he had begun al-  
 ‘ready to spin about a whole people, while cold,  
 ‘venomous, and patient he watched his victims  
 ‘from the center of his web.’ The historian is fiery in denouncing the tortuous and Machiavel-  
 ‘lian politics of the Sixteenth Century. It was an  
 ‘age when honesty, plain speaking, and respect for

<sup>1</sup> *Dutch Republic*, i, 162.

## THE UNITED NETHERLANDS

a promise had nothing to do with the conduct of affairs of state. He who could lie most adroitly was the best man. Granvelle fills his letters with innuendoes against Egmont and Orange, all the while protesting that he would not have a hair of their heads injured. It is he, according to Motley, who puts into Philip's mind the thoughts he is to think, almost in the words in which he is to utter them. Philip had his own strength, but he was slow to come to a conclusion. Granvelle knew how to clarify that muddy stream of ideas.

The preceding work shows the Dutch states in the beginning and progress of their struggle against the tyranny of Philip; the *United Netherlands* shows Holland as a rising hope of Protestantism, as a nation to be reckoned with in the diplomacy of Europe.

The Spanish king is still writing letters, still concocting schemes for conquest, still enmeshing friends and enemies alike in a web of falsehood. He is drawn off for the moment from his mission in the Netherlands to extend his conquests elsewhere. These proposed conquests have exactly one object — to enable the spirit of despotism 'to maintain the old mastery of mankind.' 'Countries and nations being regarded as private property to be inherited or bequeathed to a few favored individuals, . . . it had now become right and proper for the Spanish monarch to annex Scotland, England, and France to the very



## JOHN LOTHROP MOTLEY

‘considerable possessions which were already his  
‘own.’

A picturesque episode of the attempt upon England was the Armada. To this enterprise Motley gives one of his best and most thrilling chapters. Equally fascinating is the account of the attempt upon France, the battle of Ivry (when the white plume of Henry of Navarre carried the hopes of all liberal-minded men), and the terrible siege of Paris which almost immediately followed. ‘Rarely  
‘have men at any epoch defended their fatherland  
‘against foreign oppression with more heroism  
‘than that which was manifested by the Parisians  
‘of 1590 in resisting religious toleration, and in  
‘obeying a foreign and priestly despotism.’

Perhaps there are not to be found in the historian’s works more striking passages than those in which are described the last days of Philip the Second. To Philip’s fortitude, in agony as poignant as any he had visited upon his miserable victims, the historian gives unstinted praise. The account, which rests upon documentary basis, presents an accumulation of horrors from which a Zola or a Flaubert might have learned a lesson. The king died with a clear conscience, having upon his soul the blood of uncounted numbers of human beings, and providing in his will that ‘thirty thousand  
‘masses should be said for his soul.’

‘It seems like mere railing to specify his crimes,’ says Motley. ‘The horrible monotony of his career



## JOHN OF BARNEVELD

‘stupefies the mind until it is ready to accept the ‘principle of evil as the fundamental law of the ‘land.’ Motley’s conclusion is that Philip the Second of Spain was Machiavelli’s greatest pupil.

What remains of the book after Philip’s death lacks neither literary interest nor historic value. But we have something akin to the feeling which comes over us when the chief character in a play dies before the last act ; we question for a moment whether the interest will hold. That dominant and sinister personality leaves a void which the exploits of Prince Maurice hardly serve to fill. With these exploits, however, and a discussion of the causes leading to the Twelve Years’ Truce, Motley concluded the *History of the United Netherlands*.

In the last of his three great works, *John of Barneveld*, Motley gave full expression to his generous partisanship of all that seemed to him to stand for the spirit of liberty. With a contempt for the subtleties of theological speculation, the historian was by instinct ‘Remonstrant,’ that is, anti-Calvinistic, and found in Barneveld one of his heroes. He has painted a wonderful picture of the old advocate’s trial and death. Hounded daily by twenty-four judges, many of them his personal enemies, compelled to rely on his powerful memory in reviewing the events and explaining the acts of his forty-three years of public service, denied books, denied counsel, denied a knowledge in advance of the charges made against him, denied

## JOHN LOTHROP MOTLEY

access to the notes of his examination as it proceeded, denied everything suggested by the words 'law' and 'justice,' Barneveld came out of the ordeal so triumphantly that the announcement of his sentence might well have moved him to say: 'I am ready enough to die, but I cannot comprehend why I am to die.'

In characterization of men, in searching analysis of causes and motives, in brilliant description, and in manly eloquence, Motley's *John of Barneveld* equals its predecessors, while the note of passion is if anything intensified by the bitter experiences through which the historian had so recently passed.

A fitting postlude to Motley's work as a whole may be found in the last sentence of the *United Netherlands*. It makes clear the motives other than scholarly and creative which led to the writing of these splendid narratives. Says the historian: 'If by his labors a generous love has been fostered for that blessing, without which everything that this earth can afford is worthless, — freedom of thought, of speech, and of life, — his highest wish has been fulfilled.'

XIV

*Francis Parkman*



# Francis Parkman

## I

### HIS LIFE

**T**HE Parkmans are descendants of Thomas Parkman of Sidmouth, Devon, whose son Elias settled in Dorchester, Massachusetts, in 1633. Francis Parkman was a son of the Reverend Francis Parkman, pastor for thirty-six years of the New North Church in Boston. Through his mother, Caroline (Hall) Parkman, he was related to the famous colonial minister, John Cotton. Two of his maternal ancestors used to preach to the Indians in their own tongue. Parkman's deep interest in the 'aborigines' may have been 'partly inherited from these Puritan ancestors.' 'It does not appear, however, that he ever learned their language, and it may be regarded as certain that he never preached to them.'

Edward Wheelwright: 'Memoir of Francis Parkman, LL.D.,' *Publications of the Colonial Society of Massachusetts*, vol. i, 1895.

C. H. Farnham: *A Life of Francis Parkman*, 1901.

H. D. Sedgwick: *Francis Parkman*, 'American Men of Letters,' 1904.

## FRANCIS PARKMAN

Born in Boston on September 16, 1823, Parkman prepared for college at Chauncy Hall School and was graduated at Harvard in 1844. During his college course he 'showed symptoms of Injuns 'on the brain,' as a classmate phrased it. In 1841 he began those vacation wanderings which gave him such an intimate acquaintance with the American wilderness. Before taking his degree he had planned a book on the conspiracy of Pontiac. The year after graduation he visited Detroit and other scenes of the historic drama, collected papers, and, wherever it was possible, 'interviewed descendants of the actors.'

At his father's instance Parkman then entered the Dane Law School at Cambridge and obtained his degree (1846), but took no steps to be admitted to the bar. He studied by himself history, Indian ethnology, and 'models of English style.' The passage in *Vassall Morton* describing the influence of Thierry's *Norman Conquest* in directing the hero of the novel towards ethnological study, is thought to be autobiographical.

Having weakened his sight by immoderate reading, Parkman (in 1846) made a journey to the Northwest, 'partly to cure his eyes and partly to 'study Indian life.' He was accompanied by his friend Quincy Adams Shaw. For some weeks he lived in a village of Ogillallah Indians, sharing the tent of a chief and following the wanderings of the tribe in their search for enemies and buffalo.



## PARKMAN'S LIFE

The hardships of the life ruined his health. His sight was made worse rather than better, and his first book, *The Oregon Trail* (1849), describing these western experiences, had to be written from dictation.<sup>1</sup> It was followed by *The Conspiracy of Pontiac* (1851), and that by *Vassall Morton* (1856), an attempt at fiction. This ends the initial period of Parkman's literary life.

In 1850 Parkman married Catharine, a daughter of Doctor Jacob Bigelow of Boston. She is said to have been a woman of a sweet and joyful disposition, having a keen sense of humor, and, above all, endowed with 'the high courage requisite to 'tend unflinchingly the pain and suffering of the 'man she loved.'<sup>2</sup> It was a perfect union, but unhappily it was not to last long. Mrs. Parkman died in 1858.

The historian's health steadily declined. For years together his chief study was to keep himself alive. As a part of this study he took up floriculture, and soon found himself absorbed in it for its own sake. He became famous for his roses and lilies, and was the recipient of prizes innumerable from horticultural societies.<sup>3</sup> Yet at no time did he lose sight of his main object, the history of France in North America. Little by

<sup>1</sup> *The Oregon Trail* was first published serially in 'The Knickerbocker Magazine.'

<sup>2</sup> Sedgwick's *Parkman*, p. 217.

<sup>3</sup> His *Book of the Roses* was published in 1866.

## FRANCIS PARKMAN

little his store of materials accumulated. Even when he was at his worst physically, some progress was made. It might be only a step, but the step had not to be retraced.

As his strength returned he began to travel. To renew his acquaintance with the Indians he went to Fort Snelling in 1867. He was repeatedly in Paris consulting archives and doctors. He visited Canada in 1873 and explored over and over again the region between Quebec and Lake George.

The great historical series to which its author gave the title of *France and England in North America* began to appear just at the close of the Civil War. The volumes in the order of their publication are: *The Pioneers of France in the New World*, 1865; *The Jesuits in North America*, 1867; *The Discovery of the Great West*, 1869;<sup>1</sup> *The Old Régime*, 1874; *Count Frontenac and New France under Louis XIV*, 1877; *Montcalm and Wolfe*, 1884; *A Half-Century of Conflict*, 1892.

The merits of this extraordinary series were recognized at once as many and varied. It is a question to which of three types of reader the books most appealed,—the scholar, who is bound to read critically whether he will or no, the utilitarian in search of facts chiefly, or the mere lover of literature. Each found what he was seeking in these narratives, and each paid homage to the author in his own way.

<sup>1</sup> Later renamed *La Salle and the Discovery of the Great West*.

## PARKMAN'S LIFE

As is often true of historians far less notable than he, Parkman was the recipient of academic honors, and was made a member of numerous historical societies. The mere catalogue of these distinctions fills a page of printed text. His membership of the Massachusetts Historical Society and his degree of LL. D. from Harvard College (1889) will serve as illustrations. Parkman was influential in helping to found the Archæological Institute of America. He was one of the founders of the St. Botolph Club in Boston, and its president during the first six years of its existence.

The history of France and England in North America was completed the year before he died. Had time and strength been allowed him, he would have recast the material in the form of a continuous narrative. There might have been a gain in the new arrangement, as on the other hand there might have been a loss.

Parkman died at his home at Jamaica Plain, near Boston, on November 8, 1893.

## II

### PARKMAN'S CHARACTER

PARKMAN had prodigious will power and unequalled pertinacity. No barrier to the accomplishment of his object was allowed to stand in

## FRANCIS PARKMAN

the way. He was beset by the demons of ill health, and their number was legion. Unable to rout them by impetuous onslaught, he tired them out, thinning their ranks, one by one. He was infinitely patient, full of devices for outwitting the enemy. Beaten again and again, he stubbornly renewed the fight. Threatened with blindness, he set himself to avoid it, and did. Threatened with insanity, he declined to become insane.

Nothing could be more admirable than the spirit in which he faced daily torment. He was that extraordinary being, a cheerful stoic. Four times in his life it was a question whether he would live or die. Parkman admitted that once, had he been seeking merely his comfort, he would have elected to die. That must have been the time when, in response to his physician's encouraging remark that he had a strong constitution, Parkman said: 'I'm afraid I have.' In ordinary conditions of ill health he was bright, cheery, philosophical, but when he suffered most he was silent. At no time was he capable of complaining.

Parkman loved to face the hard facts of life and was apt to admire others in the degree in which they showed a like spirit. He had a sovereign contempt for everything not manly and robust. He contradicted with amusing emphasis the statement in some biographical notice that he was 'feeble.' By his philosophy the militant attitude toward life was the true one. He believed in war

## PARKMAN'S CHARACTER

as a moral force ; it made for character both in the man and in the nation. 'The severest disappointment of his life was his inability to enter the army 'during our civil war.'

He was wholly free from certain narrow traits which are too apt to be engendered in a life devoted to books and authorship. Manly, open-hearted, unspoiled, he neither craved honors nor despised them. It has been remarked that while he was gratified by the recognition accorded his work in high places, he was equally pleased with a letter from 'a live boy' who wrote to tell him how much he had enjoyed reading about Pontiac and La Salle. He himself kept to the last a certain boyish frankness of mind and heart. The year before he died he wrote to the secretary of the class of '44 : 'Please give my kind regrets and 'remembrances to the fellows.'

There have been not a few attractive personalities in the history of American letters. Parkman was one of the most attractive among them.

### III

#### THE WRITER

THE style is clear and luminous. Short sentences abound, giving the effect of rapidity. The mind of the reader never halts because of an obscure



## FRANCIS PARKMAN

term or some intricacy of structure. Neither is the page spotted with long words ending in *tion*, and which coming in groups, as they do in Bancroft, are like grit in the teeth. Parkman did not attain the exquisite grace and composure which characterize Irving's prose, but he came nearer to it than did Prescott. The historian of Ferdinand and Isabella had a self-conscious style. Agreeable as it is, it reveals a man always on guard as he writes. In his most eloquent passages Prescott is formal, precise, even stiff.

Parkman's style is wholly engaging. There is a captivating manner about it, the result of his immense enthusiasm for his theme. Infinitely laborious in the preparation, sceptical in use of authorities, temperate in judgment, when, however, it comes to telling the story, he allows his genius for narration a free rein, and the style, though losing none of its dignity, is eager and almost impetuous. The historian speaks as an eye-witness of all he describes.

This explains Parkman's popularity in large degree. Fascinating as the subject is, the manner adds a hundred fold. He who reads Bancroft gets a deal of information, for which he pays a round price. He who reads Parkman gets facts, eloquence, philosophy, besides no end of adventure, and for all this he pays literally nothing.



# THE OREGON TRAIL

## IV

### EARLY WORK

#### OREGON TRAIL, CONSPIRACY OF PONTIAC, VASSALL MORTON

*The Oregon Trail* ranks high among books which, though sometimes written for quite another purpose, are read chiefly for entertainment. Such was *Two Years before the Mast*, such was *The Bible in Spain*, that skilful work of a most accomplished poseur.

In addition to its value as literature, *The Oregon Trail* is a trustworthy account of a no longer existent state of society. It is a document. The range of experience was narrow, and the adventures few, but so far as it goes the record is perfect; and when read in connection with his historical work, the book becomes a commentary on Parkman's method. Here is shown how he got that knowledge of Indian life and character which distinguishes his work from that of other historical writers who touch the same field. The knowledge was utilized at once in his next work.

*The Conspiracy of Pontiac* is the sort of book people praise by saying that it is as readable as a novel. The comparison is unfortunate. So many novels are disciplinary rather than amusing. One

## FRANCIS PARKMAN

wishes it were possible to say of them that they are as readable as history.

Nevertheless it is quite true that the virtues supposed to inhere chiefly in a work of fiction are conspicuous in this the first of Parkman's historical studies. *The Conspiracy of Pontiac* is a story, filled with incident and abounding in illustrations of courage, craft, endurance, stubbornness, self-sacrifice, despair, triumph. The plain truth shames invention. Pontiac lives in these pages describing his towering ambition. So do the other actors, — Rogers, Gladwyn, Campbell, Catharine the Ojibwa girl. The supernumeraries are strikingly picturesque, — Canadian settlers, trappers, coureurs des bois, priests, half-breeds, and Indians, the motley denizens of frontier and wilderness. A forest drama played by actors like these is bound to be absorbing were it only as a spectacle.

One fact becomes apparent on taking up this book. History as Parkman writes it is both dramatic and graphical, filled with action and movement, filled with color, form, and beauty. With such an eye for effect it is impossible for him to be dull. Open the volume at random and the wealth of the author's observations seems to have been showered on that page. But the next page is like it, and also the next.

The vivacity of youth explains much in this narrative. Parkman was but twenty-six when he wrote *The Conspiracy of Pontiac*. Being young, he

## CONSPIRACY OF PONTIAC

was not afraid to be eloquent, to revel in descriptions of sunrise and sunset, tempests, the coming of spring, the brilliant hues of autumn foliage, the soft haze of Indian summer. His chapters are richly enamelled with these glowing pieces of rhetoric. He is no less brilliant in his martial scenes ; the accounts of the Battle of Bloody Bridge and of Bouquet's fight in the forest are extraordinarily well done.

The historian is severe on writers who have idealized the Indian. Here is one of Parkman's own characterizations: 'The stern, unchanging features of his mind excite our admiration from their very immutability ; and we look with deep interest on the fate of this irreclaimable son of the wilderness, the child who will not be weaned from the breast of his rugged mother. And our interest increases when we discern in the unhappy wanderer, mingled among his vices, the germs of heroic virtues,—a hand bountiful to bestow, as it is rapacious to seize, and, even in extremest famine, imparting its last morsel to a fellow sufferer ; a heart which, strong in friendship as in hate, thinks it not too much to lay down life for its chosen comrade ; a soul true to its own idea of honor, and burning with an unquenchable thirst for greatness and renown.' Neither poet nor novelist really needs to embroider such an account of the Red Man.

This successful historic monograph was followed

## FRANCIS PARKMAN

by an unsuccessful novel, written, it is thought, for recreation. Without being an autobiography, *Vassall Morton* abounds in autobiographical passages. Its failure was not of the kind that proves inability ever to master the art of fiction. The loss to American letters however would have been incalculable had Parkman's genius for historical narrative been sacrificed in any degree to novel writing. And this might have happened had *Vassall Morton* been a success.

### V

## FRANCE AND ENGLAND IN NORTH AMERICA

THE history of France in North America abounds in everything appealing to the love of the heroic. Parkman writes in a spirit of frank and contagious admiration. Himself of Puritan blood and appreciative of the best in Puritan character, he makes the pale narratives of the contentious little English republics seem colorless indeed when laid beside his glowing pages. The great warriors, the brave and fanatical priests, the adventurous rangers, and the iron-hearted explorers of New France were born to be wondered at and extolled. Without assuming that these men had a monopoly of virtue, Parkman scatters praise with a free hand.

## PIONEERS OF FRANCE

The germ of this massive and beautiful work is contained in the introductory chapters of *Pontiac*. Here is outlined the history of French exploration, religious propagandism, and military conquest or defeat up to the fall of Quebec.

The first three narratives (*The Pioneers of France*, *The Jesuits*, and *La Salle*) cover the period of inception. They abound in illustrations of heroism, self-sacrifice, and missionary fervor. The last three volumes (*Count Frontenac*, *A Half-Century of Conflict*, and *Montcalm and Wolfe*) describe the struggle of rival powers for supremacy. They are characterized mainly by illustrations of commercial greed, ecclesiastical jealousy, personal and political ambition. Midway in the series and related alike to what precedes and what follows is the fascinating volume, *The Old Régime in Canada*.

The title of the initial volume, *The Pioneers of France in the New World*, exactly describes it. The 'Pioneers' are the Basque, the Norman, and the Breton sailors who, from an almost unrecorded past, crossed the sea yearly to fish on the banks of Newfoundland. They are Jacques Cartier of St. Malo, who first explored the St. Lawrence, Roberval, La Roche, and De Monts. Men of their time, they were both devout and unscrupulous. Among them and their followers were grim humorists. When, after the arrival of De Monts's company in Acadia, a priest and a Huguenot minister died at the same time, the crew buried them



## FRANCIS PARKMAN

in one grave 'to see if they would lie peaceably 'together.'

Chief among the great names of this period is that of Samuel Champlain, the 'life' of New France, who united in himself 'the crusader, the 'romance-loving explorer, the curious, knowledge-seeking traveller, the practical navigator.' Such a man has a breadth of vision and strength of purpose in comparison with which the sight of common men is blindness and their strength infirmity.

The second narrative in the series, *The Jesuits in North America*, is an amazing record of courage, fanaticism, indomitable will, perseverance, and martyrdom. The book contains the gist of the famous *Jesuit Relations*. A man may be forgiven for not wearying himself with the tediousness of those good fathers who were often as long-winded as they were brave. But he is inexcusable if he has not learned to admire them through Parkman's thrilling account of their physical sufferings and spiritual triumphs. Those giants of devotion, Brébeuf, Lalemant, Garnier, and Jogues, seem both human and superhuman as they move across the stage of history.

In *La Salle and the Discovery of the Great West* we have a story of zeal of another sort. La Salle is a pathetic figure. Yet to pity him were to offer insult. He stood apart from his fellows, misunderstood and maligned, but self-centred and self-



## COUNT FRONTENAC

sufficient. His contemporaries thought him crack-brained; suffering had turned his head. They mocked his schemes and denied the truth of the discoveries to which he laid claim. His history is one of pure disaster. But no one of Parkman's heroes awakens greater sympathy than this silent man who found in the pursuit of honor compensation enough for incredible fatigues and sacrifices.

*The Old Régime in Canada* treats of the contest between the feudal chiefs of Acadia, La Tour and D'Aunay, of the mission among the Iroquois, of the career of that imperious churchman Laval, and then, in a hundred and fifty brilliant pages, of Canadian civilization in the Seventeenth Century. This section is a model of instructive and stimulating writing, grateful alike to the student of manners and to the amateur of literary delights.

The last volume shows the construction of the 'political and social machine.' The next, *Count Frontenac and New France*, shows the 'machine in action.' The period covered is from 1672 to 1698. Frontenac's collision with the order which controlled the spiritual destinies of New France led to his recall in 1682. La Barre, who succeeded Frontenac, was a failure. Denonville, the next governor, could live amicably with the Jesuits, but religious fervor proved no substitute for tact in dealing with the savages. There was need of a man who could handle both Jesuits and Indians.

At seventy years of age Frontenac returned to prop the tottering fortunes of New France. One learns to like the irascible old governor who was vastly jealous of his dignity, but who, when the need was, could take a tomahawk and dance a war-dance to the great admiration of the Indians and to the political benefit of New France.

The story of the struggle for supremacy is continued in *A Half-Century of Conflict*.<sup>1</sup> That phase of the record relating to the border forays is almost monotonous in its unvarying details of ambuscade, murder, the torture-stake, and captivity. The French and their Indian allies descended on the outlying settlements of New England with fire, sword, and tomahawk. Deerfield was sacked, and the country harried far and wide.

In the mean time French explorers were advancing west and south. Some, in their eagerness to anticipate the English, established posts in Louisiana. Others, with a courage peculiar to the time rather than to any one race, pushed beyond the Missouri to Colorado and New Mexico, to Dakota and Montana, led on by mixed motives such as personal ambition, love of gain, patriotism.

A spectacular event of the period was the siege and capture of Louisbourg by a force largely com-

<sup>1</sup> *A Half-Century of Conflict* was not published until after the *Montcalm and Wolfe*. The historian became fearful lest some accident should prevent his completing the part of his narrative towards which all his study had tended.

## MONTCALM AND WOLFE

posed of New England farmers and fishermen. The project was conceived in audacity and carried out with astonishing dash and good humor. That was singular military enterprise which in the mind of an eye-witness bore some resemblance to a 'Cambridge Commencement.' 'While the cannon bellowed in the front,' says Parkman, 'frolic and confusion reigned at the camp, where the men raced, wrestled, pitched quoits, and . . . ran after French cannon balls, which were carried to the batteries to be returned to those who sent them.'

The volumes entitled *Montcalm and Wolfe* crown the work. With stores of erudition, a finely tempered judgment, a practised pen, and taste refined by thirty years' search for the manliest and most becoming forms of expression, Parkman gave himself to the writing of this his masterpiece. The work is the longest as well as the best of the seven parts. Every page, from the account of Céloron de Bienville's journey to the Ohio to the story of the fall of Quebec, is crowded with fact, suggestion, eloquence. The texture of the narrative is close knit. The early volumes are often disjointed. They resemble groups of essays. Chapters are so completely a unit that they might be read by themselves with little regard to what preceded or what was to follow. Not so the *Montcalm and Wolfe*, which is a perfectly homogeneous piece of work.

## FRANCIS PARKMAN

This series of narratives has extraordinary merits. Let us note a few of them.

Among Parkman's virtues as a historian are clarity of view, a singularly unbiased attitude, an eye for the picturesque which never fails to seize on the essentials of form, color, and grouping, extraordinary power of condensation, a firm grasp of details, together with the ability to subordinate all details to the main purpose. But other historians have had these same virtues; we must find something more distinctive.

History as Parkman conceived it cannot be based on books and documents alone. The historian must identify himself with the men of the past, live their life, think their thoughts, place himself so far as possible at their point of view. Since he cannot talk with them, he must at least talk with their descendants. But the nature of the 'habitant' cannot be studied, in the latitude of Boston, it must be studied on the St. Lawrence. A city covers the site of ancient Hochelaga, nevertheless the historian must go there, and under the same sky, with many features of the landscape unchanged, reconstruct Hochelaga as it was when Jacques Cartier's eyes rested upon it in 1535. This indicates Parkman's method. When he visited a battle-field it was not as one who aimed at mere mathematical correctness of description, but as an artist whose imagination took fire at the sight of a historic spot, and who had there a vision of

## CONCLUSION

the past such as would not come to him in his library.

Would we see Parkman in a characteristic rôle we should not go to his literary workshop, but for example to the little town of Utica, Illinois. There one summer night, sitting on the porch of the hotel, Parkman described to a group of farmers gathered about, the location of La Salle's fort and of the great Indian town. The description was based on what he had learned from books 'nearly 'two hundred years old.' His improvised audience gave hearty assent to its accuracy. Parkman was there to obtain accuracy of another sort. The next day he visited all the localities which formed the background of the historic drama and reconstructed the life of the time. This is but one instance among hundreds which might be brought forward to show the pains he took. Herein lay the distinctive feature of his method. He used imagination not to embroider the facts of history, but to give to dead facts a new life. A faculty of the mind which is supposed to vitiate history becomes in Parkman's hands a means for arriving at truth.

Parkman was a fortunate man. He was happy in his choice of a subject. The theme was a great one, worthy the pen of so profound a scholar and so gifted a literary artist. To this theme he gave his life, working with singleness of purpose and under incredible difficulties. No trace of this suffering can be detected in the temper of his judg-

## *FRANCIS PARKMAN*

ments, or in the even flow and bright radiance of his narrative. He was not only happy in his mastery of his subject, he was most happy in his mastery of himself. Parkman's life is a reproach to the man who, working amid normal conditions of health and fortune, permits himself to complain that there are difficulties in his way.



XV

*Bayard Taylor*



# Bayard Taylor

## I

### HIS LIFE

**B**AYARD TAYLOR in 1841, when he was sixteen, contributed to the Philadelphia 'Saturday Evening Post' the verses entitled 'Soliloquy of 'a Young Poet.' In 1878, the year of his death, he was still planning new literary enterprises, and in so far as declining health permitted, carrying them out. If unwearied devotion through nearly forty years to the literary life, great fecundity in production, much taste, no little scholarship, and unquestioned sincerity in the exercise of his art entitle one to be called by the honorable name of man of letters, who is more deserving than the author of *The Masque of the Gods*? To be sure, only a few of his many books are read. But Taylor is in no worse case than many men who tower giant-fashion above him. They likewise have written forty volumes and are known and measured by two or three.

Marie Hansen-Taylor and H. E. Scudder: *Life and Letters of Bayard Taylor*, 1884.

A. H. Smyth: *Bayard Taylor*, 'American Men of Letters' [1896].

## BAYARD TAYLOR

Taylor was partly of German, partly of English Quaker stock, and could boast an ancestor (Robert Taylor) who had come to America with William Penn. The fourth of the ten children of Joseph and Rebecca (Way) Taylor, he was born at Kennett Square, Pennsylvania, on January 11, 1825. His education was got at the neighboring academies of Westchester and Unionville. He was a rhymester at the age of seven, and had become an industrious writer by the time he was twelve.

Having no inclination towards school-teaching and still less towards his father's vocation, farming, Taylor was apprenticed to a printer. He was presently seized with a passion for travel, and in 1844, with one hundred and forty dollars in his pocket, payment in advance for certain letters he was to write for Philadelphia journals, he set out on a pedestrian tour of Europe. He had a few remittances from home. Greeley promised to print some of his letters provided they were 'not descriptive' and that before writing them the young traveller made sure that he had been in Europe 'long enough to 'know something.' Seventeen of Taylor's letters appeared in the 'Tribune.'

By rigid economy Taylor managed to get on. But one must have youth to endure the hardships of such a journey. Especially must one have youth if he proposes, as Taylor did, to walk from Marseilles to Paris in the cold winter rains. The history of these two years of wandering is recounted

## TAYLOR'S LIFE

in *Views Afoot, or Europe seen with Knapsack and Staff* (1846).

Taylor returned to America and took up journalism. Failing in an attempt to make of the 'Phœnixville Pioneer' a paper according to his ideal, he went to New York (December, 1847). After various experiences he secured a place on the 'Tribune,' was rapidly advanced, and became in time a stockholder. He was sent to California to report on the gold discoveries. This journey furnished him with the matter for his second book of travel, *El Dorado, or Adventures in the Path of Empire* (1850).

His whole subsequent career is but a variation on the themes of 1846 and 1850. He went everywhere,—to Egypt, Palestine, Syria, Asia Minor (1851-52); to Spain and India, then on to China, where he joined Perry's expedition to Japan (1853). He was in Germany, Norway, and Lapland in 1856, in Greece in 1857-58, in Russia in 1862-63 (where for a while he held the post of secretary of legation), in Switzerland, the Pyrenees, and Corsica in 1868, and in Egypt and Iceland in the same year (1874).

All his adventures were transmuted into books: *A Journey to Central Africa*, 1854; *The Lands of the Saracen*, 1854; *A Visit to India, China, and Japan in the Year 1853*, 1855; *Northern Travel*, 1857; *Travels in Greece and Russia*, 1859; *At Home and Abroad*, 1859; *At Home and Abroad*,

## BAYARD TAYLOR

‘second series,’ 1862; *Colorado*, 1867; *By-Ways of Europe*, 1869; *Egypt and Iceland*, 1874.

A part of the great success of these books was due to causes far from literature. Doubtless, if written to-day, the volumes would be read, but it were idle to suppose that they could have the vogue they enjoyed in the Fifties. The American public of a half-century ago was not nomadic. It had few ways of gratifying its thirst for knowledge of foreign lands. Photographs were so expensive that one seldom ran the risk of being obliged to sit down with a friend ‘just back from Europe’ to admire such novelties as the Leaning Tower and the Bridge of Sighs. The oxyhydrogen stereopticon was imperfect, the panorama clumsy and ill-painted. Therefore the writings of a man who had the knack of telling agreeably what he had seen were most welcome. The home-keeping public enjoyed also hearing the traveller talk. When Taylor lectured (for he became one of the most popular lecturers of the day) they crowded the hall and thought two hours of him not long enough.

Timeliness, however, does not explain all the success of *Views Afoot* and its companion volumes. Taylor was an excellent writer even when he wrote most hastily. If his word-pictures were often highly colored, they possessed, among other virtues, the great virtue of having been painted on the spot. Through their aid one could really see what Taylor had himself seen.



## TAYLOR'S LIFE

But Taylor was a poet before he was a traveller. In 1844 he published (under the patronage of R. W. Griswold, his first literary adviser) a little volume entitled *Ximena, or, The Battle of the Sierra Morena, and Other Poems*. It was followed by *Rhymes of Travel* (1848) and *The American Legend*, the Phi Beta Kappa poem at Harvard (1850). To these must be added *A Book of Romances, Lyrics, and Songs*, 1851; *Poems and Ballads*, 1854; *Poems of the Orient*, 1854; *Poems of Home and Travel*, 1855; *The Poet's Journal*, 1862; *The Picture of St. John*, 1866; *The Masque of the Gods*, 1872; *Lars*, 1873; *The Prophet*, 1874; *Home Pastorals, Ballads, and Lyrics*, 1875; *The National Ode* (read by the author at the opening of the 'Centennial'), 1876; and *Prince Deukalion*, 1878. The great translation of Goethe's *Faust*, with the commentary, appeared in 1870-71.

Not content with his commercial success as a writer of travels, and his artistic triumphs in poetry, Taylor tried fiction. The first of his four novels, *Hannab Thurston* (1863), is in part a satire and shows in their most disagreeable light the people who abhor meat and swear by vegetables, the people who profess to hold communication with spirits, the people who think other people ought not to buy and sell human flesh, and so forth.

*John Godfrey's Fortunes* (1864) embodies not a few of Taylor's journalistic experiences in New

## BAYARD TAYLOR

York. Here are glimpses of literary society such as the soirées at the home of Estelle Ann Lewis, the Mademoiselle de Scudéry of that time and place. *The Story of Kennett* (1866) is a Pennsylvanian study, a true and lively picture of a phase of civilization which the author perfectly understood. *Joseph and his Friend* (1870) closed the series of efforts by which Taylor tried to earn money enough to free him from the thralldom of the lecture platform.

His other publications were *Beauty and the Beast, and Tales of Home* (1872), *The Echo Club* (1876), the posthumous *Studies in German Literature* (1879), and *Essays and Studies* (1880).

Of Taylor's private life a few important facts remain to be recorded. The pathetic story of Mary Agnew, the beautiful girl whom he had loved since they were school-children together, and whom he married on her death-bed, is a romance which fortunately has been well told by both of Taylor's biographers. In 1857 (seven years after Mary Agnew's death) Taylor married Marie Hansen, daughter of Professor Hansen of Gotha, the astronomer. How devoted and helpful she was to him during his arduous life, and how loyal to his memory, are facts too well known to require emphasis.

The home at Kennett known as 'Cedarcroft' was built in 1859-60. Taylor lavished on it both money and affection; and while for a few years it

## TAYLOR'S CHARACTER

gave him a deal of happiness, it proved in the end a burden he could ill afford to carry.

Robust and vigorous though he seemed in middle life, Taylor by unremitting activity had sapped his powers. He gave no evidence of declining literary ambition, but at fifty he was worn out by overwork. A notable recognition of his worth came to him in 1878, when President Hayes appointed him Minister to Germany. He was not to enjoy the honor for long. In May, 1878, he took up the duties of his office, and on the fifteenth of the following December he died while sitting in his armchair in his library.

## II

### HIS CHARACTER

AMBITION was a ruling motive in Taylor's life. Yet there has seldom been an ambition which, albeit as consuming as fire, was at the same time so free from selfish and ignoble elements.

Taylor aspired to fame through cultivation of the art of poesy. This was the real object of his life. To gain this object he toiled unceasingly and made innumerable sacrifices. Baffled in the attempt to reach his ideal, he was a little comforted when he could persuade himself that he had not fallen completely short of it. And there was exceeding

## BAYARD TAYLOR

great reward in the knowledge that if wide recognition as a poet was denied him, his friends, Whittier, Longfellow, Stoddard, Boker, and Aldrich, knew for what he was striving and commended him in no uncertain tones.

Whittier described Taylor as one who loved 'old friends, old ways, and kept his boyhood's 'dreams in sight.' Life was intensely interesting to Taylor. Although the zest of travel disappeared and his large experience of the ways of men had had its customary disillusioning effect, he never really lost his youthful enthusiasm. And it is touching to find in his private correspondence the repeated proofs of how inexhaustible was his fund of hope and of courage, and how quick he was to recover after real or fancied defeat.

Notwithstanding his successes, and he had his share of the good things of life, — contemporary reputation, money of his own earning, and friends, — Bayard Taylor remains, with all his manly qualities, a somewhat pathetic figure in American letters. He led a restless and turbulent mental existence, and died the victim of ambition and overwork.

## THE ARTIST

### III

#### THE ARTIST

TAYLOR has been pronounced the most skilful of our metrists after Longfellow. One illustration only can be given of his interest in the mechanism of verse, and that is his poetic romance *The Picture of St. John*. The poem was not published until sixteen years after its first conception. Possibly its growth was a little retarded by the structural peculiarities.

The poem contains three hundred and fifty-five eight-line stanzas (iambic pentameter) grouped into four books. The 'ottava rima' was chosen as 'better adapted for the purposes of a romantic 'epic than either the Spenserian stanza' or the 'heroic couplet.' But the question with the poet was,—how to avoid the 'uniform sweetness' of a regular stanza while obtaining the 'proper compactness and strength of rhythm' which (in his belief) only a stanza could give. His device was to allow himself freedom of rhyme within the stanza, and this 'not to escape the laws which Poetry imposes,' but rather to impose a different law in the hope that the form would 'more readily reflect the 'varying moods.' When finally the poem was fin-

<sup>1</sup> *The Picture of St. John* was begun eleven years before Worsley published his fine version of the *Odyssey* in Spenserian stanza.

## BAYARD TAYLOR

ished Taylor found that the three hundred and fifty-five stanzas contained 'more than seventy 'variations in the order of rhyme.'

Only an enthusiast in the study of form would have undertaken the task of reproducing *Faust* in the original metres. Taylor's success was so great that his work as a translator has obscured his fame as a poet. Doubtless so nearly perfect a version had been impossible without that wonderful grasp of the spirit of the original. But it must not be forgotten how much it owes to the years of study and practice Taylor gave to the technique of his art.

### IV

## POETICAL WORK

IN 1855 Taylor published a selection from his earlier books of verse under the title *Poems of Home and Travel*. By this volume and its companion, *Poems of the Orient*, he wished, so he said at the time, to be judged. For all his other pieces he desired 'speedy forgetfulness.'

*Poems of Home and Travel* shows very well the range of Taylor's art. Here are rhymed stories ('The Soldier and the Pard' and 'Kubleh'), graceful settings of classic or Indian legend ('Hy-las' and 'Mon-da-Min'), together with a pretty fancy from Shakespeare ('Ariel in the Cloven



## POETICAL WORK

‘Pine’). A deeper chord is struck in poems of human love and loss (‘The Two Visions’) and in poems expressing aspiration for the ideal (‘Love and Solitude’), or in those which voice the poet’s joy in a life of action and struggle (‘The Life of Earth’ and ‘Taurus’). There is an ode, ‘The Harp,’ lamenting the silence of song in our America where there is so much to sing. And there are yet other odes, songs, and sonnets.

*Poems of the Orient* is a typical volume, full of color, warmth, light, breathing the intoxication and glowing with the fantasy of that great vague region we call ‘the East.’ The charm of the verses is very pronounced. How much of what we relish in the volume is really the spirit of the East can best be told by one who knows both the East and the poems. Oriental lyrics and romances would be written otherwise to-day. Taylor was partly under the thrall of that roseate view of the Orient held by Thomas Moore and his contemporaries. Sir Richard Burton has popularized a more realistic conception in which love and roses are less prominent. The flavor of *Poems of the Orient* may be known by such pieces as ‘The Temptation of Hassan Ben Khaled,’ ‘Amran’s Wooing’ (an Oriental version of young Lochinvar), ‘El Khalil,’ ‘Desert Hymn to the Sun,’ and the popular ‘Bedouin Song.’

*The Poet’s Journal*, a group of twenty-nine lyrics connected by a poetic narrative and divided into

## BAYARD TAYLOR

First, Second, and Third Evenings, is plainly autobiographical. Its varying moods of despair and dumb grief, followed by the stirrings of hope and ambition, and, under the influence of awakened love, the triumph of the spirit to will and to do, connect it with the most intimate passages in Taylor's life.

*The Picture of St. John*, an Italian romance, seems made for a popularity it somehow never attained. The worldly ambition of the artist transfigured by love, the death of the highborn girl who sacrifices wealth and pride of place for her lover, the unwitting murder of her child by his grandsire, and the redemption of the artist after months of conflict with the Power that Denies — these are elements in a work on which the poet lavished the best of his gifts.

*Lars*, a Scandinavian study, an idyl of the vales and fiords of Norway, illustrates Taylor's cosmopolitanism. Passionately as he loved the South, he could also exclaim with Ruth,

I do confess  
I love Old Norway's bleak, tremendous hills,  
Where winter sits, and sees the summer burn  
In valleys deeper than yon cloud is high :  
.  
.  
.  
I love the frank, brave habit of the folk,  
The hearts unspoiled, though fed from ruder times  
And filled with angry blood.

*Home Pastorals, Ballads, and Lyrics* contains his fine studies of Westchester County life, 'The Quaker Widow,' 'John Reed,' and 'The Old

## POETICAL WORK

'Pennsylvania Farmer,' together with such happily conceived poems as 'The Sunshine of the Gods,' 'Notus Ignoto,' 'Iris,' 'Implora Pace,' and 'Canopus,' with its richly colored lines.

Taylor wrote three dramatic poems, none of which his critics are willing to admit is a success. *The Masque of the Gods*, a lofty conception, fails (if indeed it is a failure), not through feebleness of touch, but through brevity. So vast a design needs room to expand. As it stands, the *Masque* is a preliminary sketch of what might have become in the hands of its creator a great canvas. It is something that the poet has succeeded in awakening pity for the worn-out deities terrified because of their loss of power, terrified even more by the possibility that they have no principle of life and are only the creatures of men's brains.

*The Prophet* was a courageous dramatic experiment, and will always be read with curiosity if not with pleasure. But to assume that Mormonism is wholly unfitted for poetic drama is perhaps to assume too much.

*Prince Deukalion*, written under the inspiration of *Faust*, is another of those gigantic conceptions with which Taylor's imagination loved in later life to busy itself, as if eager to try its powers to the uttermost. A theme like this, wholly removed from human interest, dealing with titanic and mythical figures, is the most dangerous in the whole range of possible subjects. Taylor rises so easily to a

## BAYARD TAYLOR

high level of poetic achievement that it seems as if he must presently touch some mountain peak. Yet he always leaves the impression of really having the strength to do that in which he fails. He disappoints through the very display of power.

His poetic work lacks idiosyncrasy, and to credit him with having given rise to a 'school' is to be generous rather than just. His talent fell just short of his ambition. A busy life with its multitude of cares and interests left him too little time for brooding upon the great themes he affected, and there was wanting the gift for relentless self-criticism which operates almost like the creative power. None the less his countrymen have not begun to discharge the debt of gratitude they owe him. Taylor had great virtues. It should be imputed to him for literary righteousness that he was willing to undertake the long poem. He never, so far as is known, made the excuse our poets continually offer, and which is almost infantile, that the general public does not care for long poems, — as if a poet were under any obligation to the general public.

XVI

*George William Curtis*





# George William Curtis

## I

### HIS LIFE

**H**ENRY CURTIS, who sailed for New England from the port of London on May 6, 1635, was the founder of the Curtis family in America. His grandson, John Curtis of Worcester, was 'a sturdy and open loyalist' of Revolutionary times whose personal character was as heartily esteemed as his political principles were detested.

George Curtis, a great-grandson of John, married Mary Elizabeth Burrill, daughter of James Burrill, Jr., Chief-justice of Rhode Island. Of their two sons George William Curtis was the younger. He was born in Providence, Rhode Island, on February 24, 1824.

With his brother James Burrill, his closest friend and almost inseparable companion, he was

Parke Godwin: *George William Curtis, A Commemorative Address*, 1892.

J. W. Chadwick: *George William Curtis, an Address*, 1893.

Edward Cary: *George William Curtis, 'American Men of Letters,'* 1894.

## *GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS*

sent to C. W. Greene's school at Jamaica Plain, near Boston, and remained there five years. He was afterwards at school in Providence for four years. In New York, whither his father had removed (in 1839) to become connected with the Bank of Commerce, Curtis studied under private tutors and had some experience of practical life in the counting-room of a German importing house.

The education given the Curtis boys had also an irregular though very agreeable side. They spent much of the time from 1842 to 1844 as students at Brook Farm. The greater part of the two following years they were at Concord, their object being to combine study and out-of-door life, and above all to be near Emerson. Taking up residence with one or other of several farmers whose local fame almost equalled that of the Concord men of letters, they spent half of each day in farm work and the other half in study or studious idleness. They were to be found regularly at the Club which met on Monday evenings in Emerson's library and which numbered among its members Hawthorne, Thoreau, and Alcott.

In August, 1846, provided by his father with a sum of money sufficient to give him what he called 'a generous background,' Curtis went abroad. He planned to be gone two years, but the background was more than generous and he did not return until 1850. He travelled leisurely through France, Germany, Italy, and the East,

## CURTIS'S LIFE

made notes of what he saw and used them partly in the form of letters to the New York 'Courier and Enquirer' and partly in the famous 'Howadji' books. His literary plans were ambitious, including as they did a life of Mehemet Ali, on which he worked for some years only to abandon it at last.

On his return to New York he began writing regularly for the 'Tribune,' and was associated with C. F. Briggs and Parke Godwin in the editorship of 'Putnam's Magazine.' When the magazine passed into the hands of Dix, Edwards, and Company, Curtis put money into the firm. By their failure he not only lost everything he had, but he also assumed a debt for which he could not have been legally held and devoted the proceeds of his lectures to paying it. He was eighteen years in ridding himself of the burden.

In 1854 he began printing the famous 'Easy Chair' papers in 'Harper's Monthly,' and in 1857 the department of 'Harper's Weekly' called 'The Lounger.' The latter was a frank imitation in part of the *Tatler* and *Spectator*, even to the letters from lady correspondents such as Nelly Lancer, Sabina Griddle, and Xantippe. During the ten years following his return from abroad Curtis published six books: *Nile Notes of a Howadji*, 1851; *The Howadji in Syria*, 1852; *Lotus-Eating*, 1852; *The Potiphar Papers*, 1853; *Prue and I*, 1857; *Trumps*, 1861. His ambitions had

## GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

hitherto been chiefly literary. To be sure, in 1856, at Wesleyan University, Middletown, Connecticut, he had given his address on 'The Duty of the American Scholar to Politics and the Times,' and had followed it with his oration on 'Patriotism' and his lecture on 'The Present Aspect of the Slavery Question.'<sup>1</sup> He had taken the stump for Frémont in 1856, and been a delegate to the Republican National Convention in 1860, where his courage, adroitness, and impassioned eloquence had saved the platform at a moment when it needed salvation. Nevertheless it may be said that the first ten years of Curtis's life as a writer and speaker were 'literary' with a strong emphasis on politics, and that the last thirty years were political with an undiminished interest in letters.

On Thanksgiving Day, 1856, Curtis married Anna Shaw, a daughter of F. G. Shaw, formerly of West Roxbury, and a sister of Colonel Robert Gould Shaw. He had made her acquaintance at Brook Farm twelve years earlier. There is a pretty reference to her in one of his letters to Dwight written in 1844. Curtis had been in Boston for the day: 'Anna Shaw and Rose Russell passed me like beautiful spirits; one like a fresh morning, the other like an oriental night.'

<sup>1</sup> When Curtis gave this address in Philadelphia (Dec. 15, 1859) a mob armed with stones and bottles of vitriol attempted to break up the meeting. Cary's *Curtis*, pp. 126-129.

## CURTIS'S LIFE

In 1863 Curtis became the political editor of 'Harper's Weekly' with the proviso that he was to have a free hand. He represented political ideals than which there can be no higher; his discussions were marked by absolute frankness, joined to perfect courtesy. The parts which fell to him in the drama of political life were always important and often conspicuous. He was a delegate both to National and to State conventions, and a delegate-at-large to the convention for revising the State constitution of New York. Although 'nominated by acclamation' for Secretary of the State of New York (1869), he refused to serve. He did allow his name to be presented for governor in the convention of 1870, supposing all to be in good faith; but when he discovered that he was the victim of a trick,—the object being to defeat Greeley,—he withdrew.<sup>1</sup>

Next to Anti-slavery his favorite cause was that of Civil Service reform. In 1865 he became 'second in command' to Thomas A. Jenckes of Rhode Island, the pioneer in the movement. He was the head of the Civil Service Commission appointed by President Grant in 1871. As president of the New York Civil Service Reform Association and of the National Civil Service Reform League, he did a work of immediate and lasting value.

In 1877 President Hayes offered Curtis his

<sup>1</sup> Cary.



## GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

choice of the foreign missions, supposing that he would elect to go to England. In refusing the honor Curtis expressed the doubt whether 'a man 'absolutely without legal training of any kind 'could be a proper minister.' Later the German mission was urged on him, but he saw no reason to change his former opinion. As an Independent, Curtis voiced opposition to machine methods in the State campaign of 1879, and in 1884 broke with his party and gave his support to Cleveland.

Albeit he was not college bred, Curtis received a full share of the honorary degrees which American colleges lavish every June upon those who have acquired reputation. For the two years prior to his death he was Chancellor of the University of New York.

The literary work of his middle and later years remains for the most part embedded in the files of 'Harper's Monthly.' Three or four little volumes of 'Easy Chair' papers (less than a tenth part of the whole number of his contributions) were printed in 1893-94. Written to serve an ephemeral purpose, these essays have a permanent value. It is singular that there is no demand for more reprints of the work of a writer whose journalism was better than most men's books. Besides the 'Easy Chair' papers there were published posthumously *Orations and Addresses edited by C. E. Norton*, 1894; *Literary and Social Essays*, 1895; *Ars Recte Vivendi*, 1898; *Early Letters of*



## HIS CHARACTER

*George William Curtis to John S. Dwight, edited by G. W. Cooke, 1898.*

Curtis died, after a long and painful illness, on August 31, 1892.

## II

### THE MAN

OF Curtis it may be said that his character is revealed in every line of his writing and in every act of his public and private life. He was gracious, winning, generous, quick to forgive, and slow to take offence. Goodness as exemplified in not a few good men is alike painful to those who possess it and to those on whom its influence is exerted. Virtue as exemplified in him never wore the austere garb or the gloomy countenance.

At the time of Curtis's defection from the Republican party incredible abuse was showered on him, not only in the press but through anonymous letters. He was much saddened by it, less from the personal point of view than because of the revelation it gave of the meanness and vindictiveness of human nature. Having thought too well of his fellows, he suffered under the disillusionment, all of which goes to show how optimistic at heart this disciple of Thackeray and writer of satires was. And when Senator Conkling made a savage personal attack on him in the New York State con-

## GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

vention of 1877, Curtis seems to have had no feeling towards his enemy but that of pity : 'It was 'the saddest sight I ever knew, that man glaring 'at me in a fury of hate and storming out his foolish blackguardism.'

If Curtis's career illustrates one thing above another, it is his willingness to sacrifice mental ease and personal comfort for an ideal. But the sacrifice was made with such good nature, such grace in the acquiescence, that one forgets its extent, and even makes the mistake of thinking that possibly it cost him little. Undoubtedly it cost him much, this giving up of literature for politics, this putting aside of all public honors because there was a nearer duty which could not be neglected.

### III

#### THE WRITER AND THE ORATOR

THE author of *Nile Notes of a Howadji* loved alliteration. In his early books he amused himself with pleasant arrangements of words such as 'camels with calm, contemptuous eyes,' or 'lustrous 'leaves languidly moving,' or 'slim minarets spir- 'ing silverly and strangely from the undefined mass 'of mud houses.' Note this description of the date-palm : 'Plumed as a prince and graceful as a 'gentleman, stands the date ; and whoever travels

## WRITER AND ORATOR

‘among palms travels in good society;’ or this of the sakias: ‘Like huge summer insects they doze upon the bank, droning a melancholy, monotonous song. The slow, sad sound pervades the land — one calls to another, and he sighs to his neighbor, and the Nile is shored with sound no less than sand.’

Alliteration is a mark of youth. Employed to excess it has a cloying effect, like that of diminished sevenths in music. Of minor rhetorical arts it is the poorest, the most seductive, the most readily abused. But we should miss it sadly from the ‘Howadji’ books. Removed from the context these phrases quoted have an artificial sound, in their place they blend perfectly.

Curtis’s style grew less florid and sensuous after the early writings. At all times it is singularly easy. One gets the impression that he was a spontaneous writer. Great productivity is not possible when there must be a constant retouching of phrases and paragraphs. The unlabored nature of his writing may explain the light estimate Curtis put on it. He is said to have been quite unwilling to reprint a volume of essays from the ‘Easy Chair.’ That anything which came with so little effort could be worth re-reading seemed not to occur to him.

He was the orator almost as soon as he was the man of letters. A rhetorician by taste and training, he knew the dangers of rhetoric and in his oratory avoided them. Clarity and grace are the most

*GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS*

obvious characteristics of every sentence. Curtis could no more have been awkward and heavy than he could have been obscure.

He can hardly be praised enough for the ease and naturalness of his allusions. We auditors grow restless when a speaker begins to cite classical names. We fear our old friends Cicero and Catiline, Cæsar and Brutus. We cannot away with Hannibal and Hamilcar. The ear has been dulled by constant repetition. Curtis knew how to make the oldest of these tiresome references seem new. All his allusions have an air of freshness and spontaneity. One would suppose the declaimers had long since exhausted the virtues of Spartacus. Curtis dared to make the old gladiator accessory to his argument in a passage like this:—

‘Spartacus was a barbarian, a pagan, and a slave.  
‘Escaping he summoned other men whose liberty  
‘was denied. His call rang clear through Italy  
‘like an autumn storm through the forest, and  
‘men answered him like clustering leaves. . . . He  
‘had no rights that Romans were bound to respect,  
‘but he wrote out in blood upon the plains of Lom-  
‘bardy his equal humanity with Cato and Cæsar.  
‘The tale is terrible. History shudders with it  
‘still. But you and I, Plato and Shakespeare, the  
‘mightiest and the meanest men, were honored in  
‘Spartacus, for his wild revenge showed the brave  
‘scorn of oppression that beats immortal in the  
‘proud heart of man.’

## NILE NOTES

Nature had bestowed on Curtis gifts which, if not indispensable to a speaker, are like free-will offerings as against tribute, and make the pathway smooth. His commanding presence, his winning smile and manner, his glorious voice, the air of high breeding, a self-possession which when accompanied by unaffected good nature is one of the most attractive traits — all combined to place him among the first of American orators. He was properly said (in a phrase which through vain repetition has almost lost its meaning) to ‘grace’ the platform.

### IV

#### NILE NOTES OF A HOWADJI, PRUE AND I, TRUMPS

‘IN Shakespeare’s day the nuisance was the Monsieur Travellers who had swum in a gundello,’ wrote Fitzgerald in a half-petulant, half-humorous mood, ‘but now the bores are those who have ‘smoked *tchibouques* with a *Peshaw*!’ He was speaking of *Eothen*. The fever for Eastern books was at its height when Curtis went abroad in 1846.

The *Nile Notes of a Howadji* describes the four weeks’ flight of the ‘Ibis’ up the river to Aboo Simbel, and the ‘course of temples’ on the return voyage. It is a book of impressions and rhapsodies, a glowing record of travel in which realism



## GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

struggles with poetry and is usually worsted. It is a dream of the Orient, delightfully parsimonious as to improving facts, and prodigal of whatever helps the home-keeping reader to comprehend the witchery and fascination of the East. A few timid souls were disturbed by 'Fair Frailty' and 'Kushuk Arnem,' which seem innocent enough now, but the timid souls no doubt found peace in other chapters, such as 'Under the Palms.'

*The Howadji in Syria* continues the record. The conditions are changed. Instead of the dahabieh, the camel; for the Ibis was substituted MacWhirter, whose exertions in trotting 'shook my soul 'within me;' for the mud villages and mysterious temples of the Nile, Jerusalem, Acre, Damascus. The temper of the book differs from that of its predecessor. In this volume Curtis is poetical, in the other he was a poet. The mocking American note is heard, as when the Howadji says 'a storm 'besieged us in Nablous and a fellow Christian of 'the Armenian persuasion secured us for his fleas, 'during the time we remained.' The Howadji has evidently undergone a measure of disenchantment. The wonders of the East are less wonderful because less vague. In Egypt there was intoxication, in Palestine and Syria there is curiosity, mingled with amusement and contempt. The characteristic quality of the second Howadji book is to be found in the descriptions of the cafés, the bazaars, and in that most excellent account of the Turkish



## LOTUS-EATING

bath ('Uncle Kühleborn'), quite the best thing of the kind that has been written.

*Lotus-Eating* is a series of journalistic letters on the Hudson, Trenton Falls, Niagara, Saratoga, Newport, and Nahant, when Nahant was 'a shower of little brown cottages fallen upon the rocky promontory that terminates Lynn beach.' Not in this wise do young men now write for newspapers, with ornate periods and quotations from Waller and Herrick. The book abounds in happy characterizations. At Saratoga 'we discriminate the arctic and antarctic Bostonians, fair, still, stately, with a vein of scorn in their Saratoga enjoyment, and the languid, cordial, and careless Southerners, far from precise in dress or style, but balmy in manner as a bland Southern morning. We mark the crisp courtesy of the New Yorker, elegant in dress, exclusive in association, a pallid ghost of Paris — without its easy elegance, its *bonhomie*, its gracious *savoir faire*, without the *spirituel* sparkle of its conversation, and its natural and elastic grace of style.' And so it runs on.

*The Potiphar Papers* is in another key. The placid observer, who, in *Lotus-Eating*, quoted from De Quincey a delectable passage on the poetry of dancing, is now a bitter satirist contemplating a corps-de-ballet of society buds gyrating in the arms of the *jeunesse dorée*. These 'bounding belles' and their admirers shock the observer with a style of dancing which in its whirl, its 'rush, its fury

## GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

'is only equalled by that of the masked balls at 'the French opera.' The book is a new treatment (new in 1853) of the old subject of *Vanity Fair*. The humor is severe. The touch is not light and the caustic writing is not happy. Curtis was never a master of the whip of scorpions. Nevertheless *The Potiphar Papers* had a vogue.

*Prue and I* is a book of the sort Zola used to hate — literature which 'consoles with the lies 'of the imagination.' It is the idyl of contented obscurity, the poetic side of humble life. Delicately wrought, light in texture, shot with charming fancies and dainty conceits, having the grace that belongs to old-school manners, this little prose poem is justly accounted its author's masterpiece.

Curtis wrote one novel, *Trumps*, and was disappointed in the result. The book is readable, but not because it is a story. Many good novelists are made, not born. *Trumps* is the work of a novelist in the making.

## V

### THE EASY CHAIR

THE twenty-seven essays of the volume entitled *From the Easy Chair* show very well in brief compass the range of their author's powers in this form. Here are reminiscences of Browning and his wife, of the Dickens readings in '67, of

## THE EASY CHAIR

Everett's oratory and Jennie Lind's singing, of a lecture by Emerson and a recital by Gottschalk or by Thalberg, of a night at the play-house with Jefferson, or a dinner at the old (the *very old*) Delmonico's, when that famous eating-house stood at the corner of Broadway and Chambers Street. The flavor of by-gone days is here. 'It 'was a pleasant little New York,' says the essayist regretfully, being mindful of the charm which a lively small city possesses, and which a big city, be it never so lively, somehow lacks.

Half the attractiveness of the 'Easy Chair' papers is due to their seemingly unpremeditated character. Curtis was not writing a book, nor was he proposing at some time, 'in response to the earnest 'solicitations of friends upon whose judgment I 'rely,' to collect and republish these fugitive leaves. He comes home after a little chat, perhaps, with John Gilbert and sits down to tell us about it. Two or three reflections suggested by the interview are thrown in quite happily, and while we listeners are most absorbed and in no mood to have him break off, Curtis rises, and with some pleasant little remark, nods, and smiles, and is gone. And one of the listeners says, 'I wish we saw him oftener. 'He comes only once a month.'

The 'Easy Chair' papers are urban as well as urbane. Curtis was a city man. We know that he had a summer home in 'Arcadia' and was happy there, but his joy in city life is betrayed in

*GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS*

almost every paper he wrote. No passionate lover of nature, intent on fringed gentians and purling brooks, penned that description of a gown — ‘a mass of pleats and puffs and marvelous trimmings, which, when profusely extravagant upon the form of an elderly woman, always reminds me of signals of distress hung out upon a craft that is drifting far away from the enchanted isles of youth.’

Satirist though he is, Curtis in the ‘Easy Chair’ is always the gentle satirist. He writes of the mannerless sex, of the people who rent boxes at the opera because they can talk better there than at home, of the taste of the town so greedy for minute details of the doings of the rich and the fashionable, but there is no acerbity in his tone. Here is an illustration of his manner. The Cosmopolitan of the ‘Easy Chair’ talks with Mrs. Grundy, who proposes as a great boon to introduce him to a very rich man. “You say he is very rich?” “Enormously, fabulously,” replied Mrs. Grundy, as if crossing herself.

‘Trifles light as air’ would be a not inadequate description of hundreds of the ‘Easy Chair’ papers. And they are quite as wholesome as air.

## THE SCHOLAR AND POLITICS

### VI

#### ORATIONS AND ADDRESSES

CURTIS's biographer holds that the volume of reports and addresses on Civil Service reform is 'in some respects the most valuable of all [his] writings.'<sup>1</sup> The entire collection of *Orations and Addresses*, comprising over a thousand pages, is no less a manual of literary than of civic virtues. A student of the art of expression can well afford to make this book his vade mecum. Here is a body of practical illustration of how to write and how to speak. The oration on 'The Duty of the American Scholar to Politics and the Times,' delivered when Curtis was thirty-two years of age, is an extraordinary performance. Few addresses hold one in the reading like this. What it must have been in the delivery we can but faintly imagine. It is another splendid proof that literature and oratory may occupy a common ground, neither usurping the other's place. With the amplest use of oratorical arts the speaker makes rhetoric subordinate to thought. It shows fully (does this oration) one marked virtue of Curtis's public discourse, its perfect urbanity. His speeches were free from invective, from personalities of any sort, from every feature born of mere impulse of the

<sup>1</sup> Cary's *Curtis*, p. 296.



## GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

moment. If he was ever tempted to give vigor and point to his phrase by means which must afterward be regretted, temptation never got the better of him.

The leading thesis of the Wesleyan College oration — that the scholar is not the recluse, the pale valetudinarian, a woman without woman's charm, but a man — may not have been new; but the putting was fresh, vivid, inspiring, eloquent. The oration may be compared with Emerson's utterances on the same theme. Emerson's treatment is the more philosophical; that of Curtis is the better adapted to public speech.

Along with this oration should be read the address on 'Patriotism,' in which Curtis defends the doctrine that where law violates the primary conception of human rights it is our duty to disobey the law, and the address entitled 'The Present Aspect of the Slavery Question,' in which Curtis said, 'Government is, unquestionably, a science of compromises, but only of policies and interests, not of essential rights; and if of them, then the sacrifice must fall on all.'

These three are but the beginning of a series of orations from among which the great eulogies of Sumner and of Wendell Phillips, of Bryant and of Lowell, may be chosen as the very crown of his work.

The critic (and there are such critics) who values almost lightly the sentimental and poetic literary



## CONCLUSION

work of Curtis's young manhood is perhaps not entirely unjust; Curtis would have agreed with him. But the critic would be unjust if he overlooked the value of this literary training in giving an enormous increase of power. We shall never know how much the editorial writer and political orator gained in clarity, precision, beauty of style, effectiveness, by the penning of a series of books in which for pages together he revels in the mere music of words. The author of the address on Sumner was largely indebted to the author of the *Nile Notes of a Howadji* and *Prue and I*.



XVII

*Donald Grant Mitchell*



# *Donald Grant Mitchell*

## I

### HIS LIFE

**D**ONALD GRANT MITCHELL, who won literary reputation under the name of 'Ik Marvel,' was born at Norwich, Connecticut, on April 12, 1822. He is a son of the Reverend Alfred Mitchell, formerly pastor of the Second Congregational Church of Norwich, and a grandson of Stephen Mix Mitchell, an eminent jurist and member of the Continental Congress. He prepared for college at John Hall's school at Ellington, and was graduated at Yale in 1841.

Three years of life on a farm for his health gave him a bent towards rural pleasures and occupations. In 1844, still in pursuit of health, he visited England, the Isle of Jersey, France, and Holland. His first book, *Fresh Gleanings, or a New Sheaf from the Old Fields of Continental Europe* (1847), was the literary fruit of this journey.

Mitchell took up the study of law in New York, but found himself physically unequal to a

[H. A. Beers]: 'Donald G. Mitchell' in the *Cyclopædia of American Biography*.

## DONALD GRANT MITCHELL

sedentary life. Moreover, France was on the eve of revolution. The young law student thought it no time to dawdle over Puffendorf, Grotius, and 'the amiable, aristocratic Blackstone,' when there was a chance to see history made. He 'threw' Puffendorf, big as he was, into the corner,' and started for Paris, spent eight months there, saw what he went to see, and described it in his second book, *Battle Summer* (1850).<sup>1</sup>

His third literary venture was a periodical essay, *The Lorgnette, or Studies of the Town, by an Opera-Goer*. It was published weekly for six months, and sold by Henry Kernot, 'a small bookseller' 'up Broadway, at the centre of what was then 'the fashionable shopping region.' For a time the secret of the authorship was well kept, Kernot being as much in the dark as the public. To divert suspicion from himself, Mitchell thought to bring out in a distant city, and under his own name, something 'of an entirely different quality' and tone' from *The Lorgnette*. He failed in getting a Boston publisher, and *Reveries of a Bachelor*, the book in question, was published by Baker and Scribner in New York (1850). Its success led to the making of another series of 'reveries.' This was *Dream Life*, written in six weeks of the summer and published in the fall of 1851. On

<sup>1</sup> There were to have been two volumes of *Battle Summer*, called respectively the 'Reign of the Blouse' and the 'Reign of the Bourgeoisie.' Only the first was published.



## MITCHELL'S LIFE

these two books 'Ik Marvel's' reputation with the general reading public still rests.

In May, 1853, Mitchell was appointed United States consul at Venice. On the thirty-first of the same month he married Miss Mary F. Pringle, of Charleston, South Carolina, and in June sailed for Italy. The account of his induction into the consular office will be found in *Seven Stories*. A lively and good-humored narrative, it is not to be read without great amusement, together with a feeling of contempt for the shabby way in which our glorious (and sometimes parsimonious) republic used to treat its humbler officials. During the two years of his consulship Mitchell collected materials for a history of the Venetian Republic. The book is still unpublished, and presumably has been long since abandoned.

The days of his public service being at an end, Mitchell returned to America and settled on an estate near New Haven ('Edgewood'), where since 1855 he has led the life of a man of letters and gentleman farmer. In addition to the books already named, he has published: *Fudge Doings*, 1855; *My Farm of Edgewood*, 1863; *Seven Stories*, 1864; *Wet Days at Edgewood*, 1865; *Doctor Johns*, 1866; *Rural Studies*, 1867;<sup>1</sup> *About Old Story Tellers*, 1877; *The Woodbridge Record*, 1883; *Bound Together*, 1884; *English Lands, Letters, and Kings*, 1889-90; *American Lands and Letters*, 1897.

<sup>1</sup> Reprinted under the title *Out-of-Town Places*, 1884.

## DONALD GRANT MITCHELL

For a time Mitchell was editor of the 'Atlantic Almanac' (1868-69), and for one year (1869) editor of 'Hearth and Home.' He served as one of the judges of industrial art at the Centennial Exhibition (1876), and was a United States commissioner at the Paris Exposition of 1878. He has lectured much on literature and art. Yale recognized his achievements in letters by conferring on him, in 1878, the degree of LL. D.

He is one of the most attractive figures of our time, not alone because of his unaffected goodness, his charm of manner, his literary reputation, but because he is the last survivor of a group of writers who in the Fifties made New York famous, and about whose association there still clings a very attractive atmosphere of romance.

## II

### THE AUTHOR AND THE MAN

A CRITIC who was given a copy of *Dream Life* and asked to draw the character of the author therefrom, might possibly come to conclusions like these. 'Ik Marvel,' he would say, must be very generous, sympathetic with respect to the lesser weaknesses of human nature, and charitable towards the greater, or else this book is a falsehood from beginning to end. He must be very manly, for

## THE AUTHOR AND THE MAN

in all its two hundred pages there is not a cynical note or a sneer. He must be humorous, or he could not have written the chapters on 'A New England Squire' and 'The Country Church,' to say nothing of the account of the loves of Clarence and Jenny. He must be sentimental, or the chapter entitled 'A Good Wife' had been an impossibility.

At every point the book betrays its Puritan origin. 'Ik Marvel' is a moralist. He makes a direct and constant appeal to the ethical sentiment. In one of his prefaces he mentions the fact — doubtless an amused smile played about his lips as he wrote the lines — that *Dream Life* has sometimes insinuated itself into Sunday-school libraries. He hopes it has 'worked no blight there.' At all events, 'there are six days in the week . . . on which its perusal could do no mischief.' Doubtless the moral lessons are commonplace enough, but their triteness is relieved by the literary quality. Puritanism without its narrowness, and sentimentalism controlled by humor and good sense, lie at the basis of *Reveries of a Bachelor* and *Dream Life*. The character of their author is to be plainly if not completely read in these two books.

The distinctive flavor of 'Ik Marvel's' literary style may be got in the pleasing volume entitled *Fresh Gleanings*. Limpidity, grace, ease, are among the virtues of his prose. The fabric of words is light, airy, richly colored at times, but not

## DONALD GRANT MITCHELL

over colored. With due recognition of his individuality it may be said that 'Ik Marvel' was a literary son of 'Geoffrey Crayon.' The sweetness, the leisurely flow of the narrative, the unobtrusiveness of manner, all suggest Irving. Perhaps Mitchell meant to acknowledge his literary paternity when he dedicated *Dream Life* to the author of *The Sketch Book*. But while we recognize this debt to Irving it is most important that we do not exaggerate it.

One marked exception must be made. There is no hint of Irving in *Battle Summer*, an account of the Revolution of 1848, every page of which echoes more or less distinctly the voice of Carlyle. So close is the imitation at times as to awaken a doubt whether *Battle Summer* was not intended for a 'serious parody.' At all events, it is one of many proofs of the strong hold the *History of the French Revolution* had on the minds of young men.

### III

#### THE WRITINGS

*Fresh Gleanings* is a volume of travel, written in a way to persuade one of the uselessness of pictorial illustrations. Its manner occasionally suggests Sterne's *Sentimental Journey*, which the young traveller may have been reading of late. Sentiment and

## THE LORGNETTE

humor are agreeably blended. Under 'Ik Marvel's' guidance one visits Paris, Limoges, Arles, Nîmes, Montpellier, Rouen, carefully avoiding the 'objects of interest' and learning much about the life. A less courageous writer would have told us more and shown us less.

Books like this always contain interpolated stories, told around the inn fire, or over the half-cup at the café. The 'Story of Le Merle,' 'An Old Chronicle of the City,' 'Hinzelmänn,' and 'Boldo's Story' are graceful, but so brief as to seem mere anecdotes.

*The Lorgnette*, consisting of the lucubrations of one 'John Timon,' is an amusing and instructive periodical. Not its least entertaining feature is the account of the literary distempers of the day, the Tupper fever, the Festus outbreak, the Jane Eyre malady, and the Typee disorder, together with other literary epidemics. Neither *The Lorgnette* nor *Fudge Doings* is now much read. But if the modern cynic, who takes, possibly, a condescending attitude towards these old satires on fashionable life, will but pick up a copy of *Fudge Doings* and try a few chapters, he will be forced to admit that if we should not to-day think of writing satire in this manner, it may have been a good way in 1855. Perchance in opening the volume at random he comes on the account of the adventure of Wash. Fudge with the black domino. In which case he will find himself betrayed into reading two



DONALD GRANT MITCHELL

chapters at least, for he must needs take the trouble to learn how the affair ended.

*Fudge Doings* and *The Lorgnette* may be looked on as a contribution to the history of manners. By their aid one reconstructs the drama of fashionable life in the mid-century, sees what was then thought monstrous, and incidentally learns how simple the vices of the grandfathers were.

*Reveries of a Bachelor* ushers one into a quaint and delightful world. The reveries are of love — whether, in the words of Robert Burton quoting Plotinus, ‘it be a God, or a divell, or passion of the ‘minde.’ The book is by no means compounded exclusively of moonshine and roses. Some of the pictures are calculated to give a bachelor pause. Here is Peggy who loves you, or at least swears it, with her hand on the *Sorrows of Werther*. She is not bad looking, Peggy, ‘save a bit too much of ‘forehead.’ But she is ‘such a sad blue’ who will spend her money on the ‘Literary World’ and the *Friends in Council*.

By the severer standards of our day Peggy was not so much of a ‘blue.’ None the less she is distinctly literary. She reads Dante and ‘funny Goll-doni’ and leaves spots of baby-gruel on a Tasso of 1680. She adores La Bruyère; even reads him while nurse gets dinner and ‘you are holding the ‘baby.’

The vision presently becomes terrific and can only be dispelled by a vicious kick at the forestick.



## DREAM LIFE

Revery, misnamed idleness, has its uses. Whatever else comes true, the Bachelor will not marry a young woman who consoles her husband for an ill-cooked dinner by quotations from the Greek Anthology.

*Dream Life* is also a collection of 'reveries.' Under the similitude of the seasons, the author has pencilled little sketches of boyhood, youth, manhood, and age. The temptation to the obvious in morals and sentiment must have been great; but again Mitchell's literary skill and his humor carry him through successfully.

*Seven Stories with Basement and Attic* is a group of narratives drawn from the author's 'plethoric 'little note books of travel.' The 'Basement' is the introduction, the 'Attic' the conclusion. The first story, 'Wet Day at an Irish Inn,' shows how, if he be observant, a man may have adventures without taking the trouble to cross the street in search of them. Three of the stories are French ('Le Petit Soulier,' 'The Cabriolet,' and 'Emile 'Roque'); another is Swiss (the 'Bride of the Ice 'King'); yet another is Italian ('Count Pesaro'), and all are exquisite, written in a style which for sweetness and unaffected ease is, if not a lost art, at all events a neglected one. It has been said that our young men would not care to write in this fashion to-day; it is a question whether our young men would be able to do so.

One novel stands to 'Ik Marvel's' credit,

## DONALD GRANT MITCHELL

*Doctor Johns*, a story of a New England country parsonage, well written because its author could not write otherwise, faithful and exact because he knew the life, yet going no deeper than other attempts to explain the New England character, the externals of which are so easy to portray and the real essence so baffling.

Among the best of 'Ik Marvel's' books are those dealing with rural life. *My Farm of Edgewood* sets forth the author's adventures in buying a country home, and his subsequent adventures in settling therein and making life variously profitable. It is a successful attempt to magnify the office of gentleman-farmer. The attractiveness of the life is not over-emphasized, nor is it pretended that that is legitimate farming which produces big crops regardless of expense.

The picture as a whole is seductive in ways not to be referred to the literary skill of the artist. It is odd enough how a lay-reader, unused to carrots and cabbages, will follow every detail of Mitchell's experiment. Here must be some outcroppings of the primitive instinct. Moreover, the book relates to home-making, a subject perennially dear to the American heart. Our restlessness has never unsettled us in that regard.

*Wet Days at Edgewood* is a companion volume. The days here celebrated, nine in number, were made bright by readings about 'old farmers, old gardeners, and old pastorals.' Rejoicing in the

strong common sense of ancient writers on husbandry, and in the quaint flavor of their style, 'Ik Marvel' chats of Roman farm and villa life, recalling what Varro and Columella had to say about the art of tilling the soil. He takes pleasure in the reflection that 'yon open furrow . . . carries 'trace of the ridging in the "Works and Days;" 'that the brown field of half-broken clods is the 'fallow (Νεός) of Xenophon,' and that 'Cato gives 'orders for the asparagus.'

Then he comes to modern times, to the days of Thomas Tusser, Sir Hugh Platt, Gervase Markham, Samuel Hartlib, Jethro Tull, and William Shenstone, men who farmed practically, or theoretically, or even poetically. 'Ik Marvel' loves them all, even those whose enthusiasm was in the ratio of their helplessness. No less dear to him is Goldsmith, who wrote what passes for a rural tale and is not rural at all, but comically urban, and Charles Lamb, who hated the country and gladly avowed it.

These are Mitchell's principal works. Having read thus far, it were a pity to overlook the two volumes on *English Lands, Letters, and Kings*, and a greater pity to overlook the instructive and entertaining *American Lands and Letters*. In brief, the reader who insists on knowing 'Ik Marvel' only by *Reveries of a Bachelor* does his author an injustice and robs himself of many hours of literary delight.

DONALD GRANT MITCHELL

Sentimentalism will always manifest itself in literature in one form or another. That there will be a return to the manner which we associate with 'Ik Marvel' is not likely, yet it was sentimentalism in its manliest form. The continued popularity of *Reveries of a Bachelor* suggests that Americans of to-day are not quite as cynical and irreverent as they are sometimes painted, or as they love to paint themselves.

XVIII

*James Russell Lowell*





# James Russell Lowell

## I

### HIS LIFE

THE Lowells of New England are descendants of Percival Lowell, a prosperous Bristol merchant who came to America in 1639 and settled at Newbury, Massachusetts. The family has been distinguished through its various representatives for public spirit and business acumen as well as for a devotion to letters. The grandfather of the poet, Judge John Lowell, was author of the clause in the Bill of Rights abolishing slavery in Massachusetts. One of his sons was founder of the great manufacturing city on the Merrimac which bears his name. A grandson established the Lowell Institute, a system of popular instruction by free courses of lectures, — a system unique, in that it aims to bring to its audiences representa-

F. H. Underwood: *The Poet and the Man: Recollections and Appreciations of James Russell Lowell*, 1893.

E. E. Hale: *James Russell Lowell and his Friends*, 1899.

H. E. Scudder: *James Russell Lowell, a Biography*, 1901.

Ferris Greenslet: *James Russell Lowell, his Life and Work*, 1905.

## JAMES RUSSELL LOWELL

tive scholars, chosen less for their skill in the graceful but often specious art of public speaking than for solid attainments.

James Russell Lowell, the youngest son of the Reverend Charles Lowell, minister of the West Church in Boston, was born at Cambridge, Massachusetts, in the colonial mansion known as 'Elmwood,' on February 22, 1819. His mother, Harriet (Spence) Lowell, was a daughter of Keith Spence, of Portsmouth, New Hampshire.<sup>1</sup>

Under William Wells (an English pedagogue of the old school) Lowell prepared for college, entered Harvard, and after some disciplinary tribulations was graduated with his class (1838). He studied law and was admitted to the bar (August, 1840), but remained briefless during the few months of his efforts to begin a practice.

While waiting for clients, he busied himself with literature. He was early a rhymers. At twelve years of age his skill in making verse had astonished his schoolfellows, one of whom rushed home in great excitement to announce that 'Jemmy Lowell' thought he was going to be a poet.

With the fearlessness of youth and in the hope of bettering himself financially, Lowell, aided by his friend Robert Carter, started a magazine, 'The Pioneer.' According to the prospectus, dated

<sup>1</sup> Keith Spence was born at Kirkwall, Orkney. Mrs. Lowell had Orcadian ancestors on both sides of the house, her maternal grandfather, Robert Traill, having also come from Orkney.

October 15, 1842, the editors proposed to supply 'the intelligent and reflecting portion of the Reading Public with a substitute for the enormous quantity of thrice diluted trash, in the shape of 'namby-pamby love tales and sketches, which is 'monthly poured out to them. . . .' Only three numbers of 'The Pioneer' were issued.<sup>1</sup> The 'Reading Public' was joined to its idols and declined to encourage 'a healthy and manly Periodical Literature.'

In 1841 was published *A Year's Life*, Lowell's first volume of verse; it was followed by *Poems* (1844), by a volume of prose, *Conversations on Some of the Old Poets* (1845), and by *Poems*, 'second series' (1848).

The 'Ianthé' of *A Year's Life* was easily identified with Maria White, the gifted and beautiful girl who, in December, 1844, became the poet's wife. The first year of their married life was passed in Philadelphia, whither Lowell had taken his bride to protect her from the harsh New England winter. Their financial resources were few, but of gayety and courage there was no lack. Lowell aspired to live by his pen. What with the small sums paid him (rather against his will) for editorial work on 'The Pennsylvania Freeman,' what with the hardly larger sums for contributions to 'Graham's Magazine' and 'The Broadway Journal,' he managed to subsist.

<sup>1</sup> January, February, and March, 1843.

Nevertheless, it seemed best for a number of reasons that the young people return to Cambridge and make a common home at 'Elmwood' with Lowell's parents. In June of this year (1846) appeared 'A Letter from Mr. Ezekiel Biglow 'of Jaalam to the Hon. Joseph T. Buckingham, 'editor of the Boston Courier, inclosing a poem of 'his son, Mr. Hosea Biglow.' This was the first of *The Biglow Papers*, the initial attack of many attacks Lowell was to make on slavery with the weapons of satire and ridicule. During 1847 three more 'papers' were printed in the 'Courier;' the remaining five appeared in 'The National Anti-Slavery Standard.'

When the 'Standard' passed from the control of a board of editors into the hands of Sydney Howard Gay, Lowell became a salaried contributor, and for a time his name appeared as corresponding editor. He was allowed a free hand. Abolitionist though he was, his abolitionism was tempered with a deal of sympathy for slaveholders. And he had interests which most reformers of the time lacked, a passionate love of letters, for example. Hence it was that in the midst of leader-writing he was penning *A Fable for Critics* and *The Vision of Sir Launfal*.

The winter of 1851-52 Lowell spent with his family in Italy, and the following spring and summer in journeyings through France, England, Scotland, and Wales. In October he sailed for home,

having as ship companions Thackeray and Arthur Hugh Clough. Just a year later Mrs. Lowell died (October 27, 1853). For months afterward Lowell was in 'great agony of mind, and he had to force 'himself into those laborious hours which one instinctively feels contain a wise restorative.'<sup>1</sup>

He abounded in literary plans, some of which (and among them a novel) were never carried out, whereas others, his papers in 'Putnam's Magazine' and his lectures on English Poetry, before the Lowell Institute, were in a high degree successful. Each lecture of the Institute course had to be given twice, so great was the demand for tickets. Lowell was very nervous over his first platform experience, and not a little pleased when he found that he could hold the audience an hour and a quarter ('they are in the habit of going out 'at the end of the hour'). The singular merit of the lectures led to his being appointed to the chair of belles-lettres at Harvard, just resigned by Longfellow. After a year's study abroad the new professor entered on his academic duties (September, 1856).

In 1857 Lowell married Miss Frances Dunlap, of Portland, Maine. She was a woman of reserved though gracious manners and rare beauty, who through her serene temper and fine critical sagacity, together with a keen sense of the humorous, exerted a most beneficent influence on Lowell's life.

<sup>1</sup> Scudder.



## JAMES RUSSELL LOWELL

The burdens of college work were not so heavy as to prevent Lowell's assuming the editorship of 'The Atlantic Monthly,' a new literary magazine with an anti-slavery bias. He held this post from 1857 to 1861, and proved to be one of the best of editors, though routine was irksome to him, and the vagaries of contributors called for more patience than he could at all times command. Two years after leaving the 'Atlantic' he undertook to edit the 'North American Review' in company with Charles Eliot Norton, on whom fell the chief responsibilities. Lowell, for his part, contributed to the 'Review' many notable papers on politics and literature.

The Civil War called out much of Lowell's most spirited prose and not a little of his best poetry. A second series of *Biglow Papers* appeared in the 'Atlantic,' and for the commemoration of sons of Harvard who had fought for the Union, Lowell wrote his magnificent *Commemoration Ode*. This noble performance was literally an improvisation, written in a single night.

At this point we may take note of Lowell's publications, subsequent to the *Poems*, 'second series.' They are: *A Fable for Critics*, 1848; *The Biglow Papers*, 1848; *Fireside Travels*, 1864; *The Biglow Papers*, 'second series,' 1866; *Under the Willows and Other Poems*, 1869; *The Cathedral*, 1870; *Among My Books*, 1870; *My Study Windows*, 1871; *Among My Books*, 'second series,'



## LOWELL'S LIFE

1876; *Three Memorial Poems*, 1877; *Democracy and Other Addresses*, 1887; *Political Addresses*, 1888; *Heartsease and Rue*, 1888.

There appeared posthumously *Latest Literary Essays*, 1891; *The Old English Dramatists*, 1892; *Letters of James Russell Lowell*, edited by C. E. Norton, 1893; *Last Poems*, 1895; *The Anti-Slavery Papers of James Russell Lowell*, 1902.

Lowell resigned his professorship in 1872 and went abroad for two years. Oxford conferred on him the degree of D. C. L. and Cambridge that of LL. D.; it pleased him to regard the Cambridge degree 'as in a measure a friendly recognition of the University's daughter in the American 'Cambridge.' In 1874 he returned home, and on the opening of college was persuaded to resume his lectures.

During the presidential campaign of 1876 Lowell became politically active in ways new to him. He was a delegate to the Republican National convention and a presidential elector. His fellow-townsmen had wished him to accept a nomination for representative in Congress; but Lowell refused, believing himself unqualified for the post.

Not long after his inauguration President Hayes, at the instance of W. D. Howells, offered Lowell the Austrian mission, an honor the poet felt impelled to decline; when, however, it was learned that he would be very willing to go to Spain, the appointment was made. He arrived in Madrid on

## JAMES RUSSELL LOWELL

August 14, 1878. Two years later he was transferred to England. Reappointed by President Garfield, he held this important charge until the close of President Arthur's administration.

Few ministers have been as popular as he. And not the least factor of his popularity in England was his sturdy patriotism. Lowell was the author of the essay 'On a Certain Condescension in 'Foreigners,' an essay which an ingratiating Anglican clergyman<sup>1</sup> says was meant to be 'overheard' in England. It were more exact to say that the essay was meant to be heard, and heard distinctly. 'They honor stoutness in each other,' said Emerson, noting the traits of the English people. And it is not unreasonable to believe that they also admire the same virtue in others.

The summer of 1885 Lowell passed at Southborough, forty miles from Boston, the home of his daughter, Mrs. Burnett. He made a number of public addresses, gave a Lowell Institute course of lectures on the 'Old English Dramatists,' argued the question of International Copyright before a committee of the Senate, and is believed to have had real influence in persuading representatives of this great country that stealing is a sin. He found himself inveigled into an author's reading, and humorously bewailed his weakness in ever having written a line of poetry. The demands upon him were enormous. It was now an effort

<sup>1</sup> H. R. Haweis: *American Humorists*.

## LOWELL'S LIFE

for him to do things, and if the grasshopper had not yet become a burden, public occasions had, and more than once he was obliged to beg off from keeping a promise inconsiderately made.

He enjoyed being in England for the summer, and usually divided his time between London and Whitby. The last of these visits took place in 1889. The ensuing winter he gave to a careful revision of his writings. In the spring of 1890 he was ill for six weeks, and though he recovered enough to be able to move about a little and to welcome his friends, serious work was out of the question. He wrote two or three short papers, and had strong inducements held out to him to write more, but the time for writing was past, and he knew it.

His sufferings during his last illness were great, but he bore them like the man he was. Lowell died at 'Elmwood,' Cambridge, on August 12, 1891.

## II

### LOWELL'S CHARACTER

'I AM a kind of twins myself, divided between 'grave and gay,' said Lowell, in one of those rare moments when he condescended to self-analysis. The duality of temperament here pointed at is one secret of the fascination he exerted on all who were

## JAMES RUSSELL LOWELL

privileged to know him intimately. The fascination was certainly great and the tributes to it numerous. Lowell's personality was so winning, and the man was so genuine, human, and lovable, that it is difficult to speak of him in terms having even the semblance of impartiality. Although strong-willed and positive, not indisposed now and then to indulge himself in the luxury of stubbornness, he was open-minded, wholly unselfish, kind-hearted, affectionate, and gentle; and while he had his reserves he was democratic in all the best senses of the word, for his democracy sprang from the depths of his nature. Changeable in his moods, he could be teasing, whimsical, irritating; but when he was most mocking and perverse he was most delightful.

There is something very attractive in Lowell's attitude toward literature and literary fame. Books were an essential part of his life. He had mastered that difficult art of *reading* as few men have mastered it. He was rarely endowed as a poet and prose-writer. And yet Lowell, the most complete illustration we have of the literary man, showed no inclination to magnify the importance of letters.

As to his individual achievements, he not only never thought of himself more highly than he ought to think, but was the rather inclined to place too low an estimate on the value of his work. Self-distrust increased with years. Nevertheless, Lowell indulged himself in no philosophy of despair. He

## LOWELL'S CHARACTER

had had much to be grateful for. 'I have always believed that a man's fate is born with him, and that he cannot escape from it nor greatly modify it' (Lowell once wrote to his friend Charles Eliot Norton) 'and that consequently every one gets in the long run exactly what he deserves, neither more nor less.' Lowell goes on to say that the creed is a 'cheerful' one; he might have added that it is no less sensible and manly than it is cheerful.

Whether he found his creed satisfactory at all times or was always conscious that he had a creed, we cannot know, but he could be the blithest of fatalists when it pleased him to be.

### III

#### POET AND PROSE WRITER

LOWELL's prose is manly, direct, varied, flexible, generally harmonious, abounding in passages marked by grace, beauty, and sweetness, and capable of rising to genuine eloquence. In its overflowing vitality and human warmth it is an adequate expression of the man, imaging his mocking and humorous moods no less than his deep sincerity, his strength of purpose, and his passion. Much of it has the confidence and ease that go with successful improvisation. If Lowell was 'willing to



## JAMES RUSSELL LOWELL

‘risk the prosperity of a verse upon a lucky throw  
‘of words,’ he was even more willing to take like  
chances with his prose.

His thought ran easily into figurative form, and the making of metaphor was as natural to him as breathing. He would even amuse himself with conceits, for he loved to play with language, to force words into shapes he might perchance have condemned had he found them in the work of another. But if style is to be representative, this playfulness, however annoying to Lowell’s critics, is a virtue. A Lowell chastened in his English and wholly academic would not be the Lowell we rejoice in.

He practised the art of poetry in many forms and always with success. Of everything he wrote you might say that it had been his study, though you might refrain from saying that ‘it had been ‘all in all his study.’ In other words, as we read Lowell the question never arises whether or not the poet is working in unfamiliar materials, but whether he might not have given his product a higher finish, the materials and the form remaining the same. He was no aspirant after flawless beauty. He wrote spontaneously and was for the time wholly possessed by his theme. But what he had written he had written ; and if never content with the result he at least compelled himself to be philosophical. He made a few changes, to be sure, but (as was said of a far greater poet) he would



## POET AND PROSE WRITER

correct with an afterglow of poetic inspiration, not with a painful tinkering of the verse.

It is by tinkering with the verse, however (the 'higher' tinkering), that perfection is attained. And he who wrote with evident ease so many lovely and felicitous lines could as easily have bettered lines that are wanting in finish. It was not Lowell's way. Too much may not be required of a man who often felt the utmost repugnance to reading his own writings, once they were in print.

### IV

#### *POEMS, THE BIGLOW PAPERS, FABLE FOR CRITICS, VISION OF SIR LAUNFAL*

LOWELL's first poetic flights were strong-winged. 'Threnodia,' 'The Sirens,' 'Summer Storm,' 'To Perdita, Singing,' whatever their faults, have a richness, a melody, a freedom of structure, an almost careless grace, that are captivating. Here was no painful effort in production with the inevitable result of frigidity and hardness.

The poet's gift matured rapidly. There is strength in such poems as 'Prometheus,' 'Columbus,' 'A Glance behind the Curtain,' rare beauty in 'A Legend of Brittany,' 'Hebe,' and 'Rhæcus,' a mystical power in the haunting lines of 'The Sower,' passion and uplift in 'The Pre-

## JAMES RUSSELL LOWELL

‘sent Crisis,’ ‘Anti-Apis,’ the lines ‘To W. L. Garrison,’ and the ‘Ode to France,’ while in ‘An Interview with Miles Standish’ is a promise of that satirical power which was presently to find complete expression in *The Biglow Papers*.

Early in his career Lowell announced his theory of the poet’s office, which is to inspire to high thought and noble action, not merely to please with pretty fancies and melodious verse. The ‘Ode,’ written in 1841, is an expression of his poetic faith. The ethical and reforming bent in Lowell’s character was so strong as to make it difficult for him, true bard though he was, to look on poetry as an art to be cultivated for itself alone.

Inspiriting as were stanzas like ‘The Present Crisis,’ Lowell’s power became most effective in the anti-slavery struggle when the outbreak of the Mexican War led to the writing of *The Biglow Papers*. Printed anonymously in a journal, copied into other newspapers, the question of their authorship much debated, these satires were at last adjudicated to the man who wrote them, but not until he himself had heard it demonstrated ‘in the pauses of a concert’ that he was wholly incapable of such a performance.

Of the characters of the little drama, Hosea Biglow, the country youth, stands for the plain common-sense of New England, opposed to the extension of slavery whatever the means employed, and above all by legalized murder with an ac-

## THE BIGLOW PAPERS

companionment of drums and fifes. The Reverend Homer Wilbur acts as 'chorus,' and by his learned comments surrounds the productions of the country muse with an atmosphere of scholarship. Bird-ofredom Sawin is the clown of the little show.

Many finer touches have become obscure by the lapse of time, and *The Biglow Papers* is now provided with historical notes; but the energy, the spirit, and the unfailing humor of the work are perennial. Lowell was most fortunate in his verbal felicities. Who could have foreseen that so much danger lurked in a middle initial, or that a plain name of the sort borne by the former senator from Middlesex contained such comic potentialities?

We were gittin' on nicely up here to our village,  
With good old idees o' wut's right an' wut aint,  
We kind o' thought Christ went agin war an' pillage,  
An' thet eppyletts worn't the best mark of a saint;  
But John P.  
Robinson he

Sez this kind o' thing's an exploded idee.

Lowell was surprised at his own success. What he at first thought 'a mere fencing stick' proved to be a weapon. The blade was two-edged, and the Yankees did well to fall back a little when he lifted it against the enemy. For in writing *The Biglow Papers* Lowell took real delight in noting the oddities and laughing at the foibles of his own New Englanders, a people whom he loved with all tenderness, but to whose faults he was not in the least blind.

## JAMES RUSSELL LOWELL

In 1861 the little puppets were taken out of the box where they had lain for fifteen years and furbished up for a new tragi-comedy. The second series of *The Biglow Papers* was read no less eagerly than the first had been. Quite as brilliant as their predecessors, the later poems are more impassioned, and in those touching on English hostility to the North the satire is bitterly stinging.

While the numbers of the first series were in course of publication Lowell produced a rhymed primer of contemporary American literature under the title of *A Fable for Critics*. It was an improvisation, and therefore the buoyancy, the jovial off-hand manner, the impudence even, were a matter of course and all in its favor. Often penetrating and just in his criticisms, Lowell was invariably amusing, and in the cleverness of the rhyme and word play quite inimitable.

Two months after the appearance of the *Fable* the popular *Vision of Sir Launfal* was published. Though undoubtedly read more for the sake of the preludes than for the slight but touching story, it is by no means certain that the preludes, brought out as independent poems, could have won the number of readers they now have. In other words, *The Vision of Sir Launfal* has a unity which it seems on first acquaintance to lack.

V

*UNDER THE WILLOWS, THE CATHEDRAL,  
COMMEMORATION ODE, THREE MEMO-  
RIAL POEMS, HEARTSEASE AND RUE*

‘UNDER the Willows’ is a poem of Nature in which the poet at no time loses sight either of the world of books or of the world of men. If he be driven indoors by the rigors of May, he is content to sit by his wood-fire and read what the poets have said in praise of that inclement month. Or if June has come and he can dream under his favorite willows, his reveries gain a zest from the interruptions of the tramp, ‘lavish summer’s bedesman,’ the scissors-grinder, that grimy Ulysses of New England, the school-children, and the road-menders,

Vexing Macadam’s ghost with pounded slate.

It is a poem of thanksgiving in which the poet voices his gratitude for the benediction of the higher mood and the human kindness of the lower.

The volume to which ‘Under the Willows’ gives its name is typical. He who prizes Lowell’s verse will hardly be content with any selection which does not include ‘Al Fresco,’ ‘A Winter-Evening Hymn to my Fire,’ ‘Invita Minerva,’ ‘The Dead House,’ ‘The Parting of the Ways,’ ‘The Fountain of Youth,’ and ‘The Nightingale in the Study.’



## JAMES RUSSELL LOWELL

Its manner of contrasting To-Day with Yesterday, the genius that creates with the spirit that analyzes, makes *The Cathedral* an essentially American poem. The minster in its 'vast repose,'

Silent and gray as forest-leaguered cliff,  
must always seem a marvel to a dweller among temples of 'deal and paint.' The poem is the meditation of a New-World conservative, altogether catholic of sympathies, who holds no less firmly to the past because, under the fascination of democracy, he breathes in the presence of the 'backwoods Charlemagne' a braver air and is conscious of an 'ampler manhood.' And what, he asks, will be the faith of this new avatar of the Goth, what temples will the creature build? Very beautiful, very suggestive, and in its shifting moods entirely representative of the poet who wrote it must this fine work always seem.

*The Ode recited at the Harvard Commemoration* (July 21, 1865) is Lowell's supreme achievement in verse. It breathes the most exalted patriotism, a love of native land that is intense, fiery, consuming. Though written in honor of sons of the University who had gone to the war, the spirit of the *Ode* is not local and particular. The poet celebrates not individual deeds alone but the sum of those deeds, not man but manhood:—

That leap of heart whereby a people rise  
Up to a noble anger's height,  
And, flamed on by the Fates, not shrink, but grow more bright,  
That swift validity in noble veins,



## THE COMMEMORATION ODE

Of choosing danger and disdaining shame,  
Of being set on flame  
By the pure fire that flies all contact base,  
But wraps its chosen with angelic might,  
These are imperishable gains,  
Sure as the sun, medicinal as light,  
These hold great futures in their lusty reins  
And certify to earth a new imperial race.

The mingling of proud humility, tenderness, and reverence, the throbbing passion and the exultant fervor of the concluding verses, lift this ode to a high place in American poetry, it may be to the highest place. To the many, however, the chief value of *The Commemoration Ode* lies in the stanza on Lincoln. So just as an estimate of character, so restrained in its accents of praise, American in all finer meanings of the word, splendid in its imagery and poignant in the note of grief, this beautiful tribute to the great president is final and satisfying.

The first of the *Three Memorial Poems* is an 'Ode, read at the One Hundredth Anniversary of 'the Fight at Concord.'

In the opening stanzas on Freedom the poet strikes the notes of exultation fitting the time and the place, then passes to those inevitable allusions which appeal to local pride (and Lowell handles this passage with utmost skill), draws the lesson that must of necessity be drawn from the 'home-spun deeds' of the men of old, makes Freedom utter her warning to the men of the present, and, no prophet of evil, closes in the triumphant spirit in which he began.

JAMES RUSSELL LOWELL

'Under the Old Elm' is a magnificent tribute to a man so great that there is need of odes like this to help us comprehend his greatness. After calling up the scene when Washington, 'a stranger 'among strangers,' stood beneath that legendary tree to take command of his army, 'all of captains,' a motley rout, valorous deacons, selectmen, and village heroes among others, more skilled in debating their orders than obeying them, good fighters all, but 'serious drill's despair,' — the poet chants those beautiful lines in which is drawn the distinction between 'Nation' and 'Country.' The one is fashioned of computable things, good each in its kind and important in its place:—

But Country is a shape of each man's mind  
Sacred from definition, unconfined  
By the cramped walls where daily drudgeries grind;  
An inward vision, yet an outward birth  
Of sweet familiar heaven and earth;  
A brooding Presence that stirs motions blind  
Of wings within our embryo being's shell  
That wait but her completer spell  
To make us eagle-natured, fit to dare  
Life's nobler spaces and untarnished air.

You who hold dear this self-conceived ideal,  
Whose faith and works alone can make it real,  
Bring all your fairest gifts to deck her shrine  
Who lifts our lives away from Thine and Mine  
And feeds the lamp of manhood more divine  
With fragrant oils of quenchless constancy.  
When all have done their utmost, surely he  
Hath given the best who gives a character  
Erect and constant, which nor any shock  
Of loosened elements, nor the forceful sea  
Of flowing or of ebbing fates, can stir  
From its deep bases in the living rock  
Of ancient manhood's sweet security. . . .

## HEARTSEASE AND RUE

And the poet longs for skill to praise him fitly whom he does fitly praise in the stanzas that follow. It is a thoughtful, nobly eloquent, and poetically beautiful characterization of the great Virginian, and appropriately closes with a fine apostrophe to the historic Commonwealth from which Washington sprang.

The 'Ode for the Fourth of July, 1876,' though not lacking in forceful lines and fine imagery, is the least happy of the three poems. The questioning and critical mood is prominent. But the spirit of confidence prevails and is voiced in the invocation with which the ode concludes.

Various notes are touched in the collection of eighty-eight poems to which its author gave the title of *Heartsease and Rue*. Here are verses new and old, grave and gay, satirical, humorous, sentimental, and elegiac, epigrams, inscriptions, lyrics, poems of occasion, sonnets, epistles, and, chief among them, the ode written on hearing the news of the death of Agassiz. Whether, as has been asserted, 'this poem takes its place with the few great 'elegies in our language, gives a hand to "Lycidas" 'and to "Thyrsis," ' is a question to be decided by the suffrages of many good critics, rather than by the dictum of one. There is no doubt, however, that by virtue of its human quality, depth of personal feeling, sincerity in the accent of bereavement, and felicity of phrase, the 'Agassiz' will always stand in the first rank of Lowell's greater verse.

VI

*FIRESIDE TRAVELS, MY STUDY WINDOWS,  
AMONG MY BOOKS, LATEST LITERARY  
ESSAYS*

*Fireside Travels* is so entertaining a book as to make one wish that Lowell had chronicled more of his journeyings at home and abroad in the same amusing style. Two of the six essays — ‘Cambridge Thirty Years Ago’ and ‘A Moosehead Journal’ — take the form of letters addressed to the author’s friend, ‘the Edelmann Storg’ (W. W. Story). The others are grouped under the general title of ‘Leaves from my Journal in Italy and Elsewhere.’

One spirit animates the pages of this book, — a love of plain people, homely adventures, everyday sights and sounds. In a half-serious way (as if to show that he knows how to ‘do’ a tempest in the mountains or an illumination of St. Peter’s) Lowell throws in a number of unconventional passages on entirely conventional themes. But the strength of the book lies in the sympathetic and humorous accounts of that protean animal Man, who, whether he showed himself in the guise of a denizen of Old Cambridge, or of Uncle Zeb, who had been ‘to the ’Roostick war,’ or of the Chief Mate of the packet ship, or of Leo-

## LITERARY ESSAYS

poldo, the Italian guide, was more interesting to Lowell than any other object of his study.

Together with *Fireside Travels* may be read 'My Garden Acquaintance' and 'A Good Word for Winter,' from *My Study Windows*, gossipy papers on Nature by one who looked on 'a great deal of the modern sentimentalism about Nature as a mark of disease . . . one more symptom of the general liver complaint.' The sincerity of Lowell's love of birds, beasts, flowers, trees, the sky and the landscape, admits of no question. Yet he approached Nature more or less through literature, as was becoming in a man brought up on White's *Selborne*; and he seems his characteristic self when, having pulled a chair out under a tree, he sits there with a volume of Chaucer in his hands, looking up from the page now and then to watch his feathered neighbors, and make wise and humorous comments on their doings.

*Among My Books* is a volume of literary and historical studies, six in number, entitled respectively, 'Dryden,' 'Witchcraft,' 'Shakespeare Once More,' 'New England Two Centuries Ago,' 'Lessing,' 'Rousseau and the Sentimentalists.' All are in Lowell's best manner, and the 'Dryden' and 'Shakespeare' are particularly fine examples of those leisurely, stimulating, and always brilliant literary studies which this scholar knew so well how to write.

Of the thirteen papers in *My Study Windows*



that on 'Abraham Lincoln'<sup>1</sup> and the one 'On a 'Certain Condescension in Foreigners' have a political bearing; those on 'A Great Public Character' (Josiah Quincy) and 'Emerson the Lecturer' are studies in personality; the 'Library of Old 'Authors' is an exercise in textual criticism, a merciless arraignment of certain unfortunate editors; the 'Carlyle,' 'James Gates Percival,' 'Thoreau,' 'Swinburne's Tragedies,' 'Chaucer,' and 'Pope' are studies in literary history and interpretation.

*Among My Books*, 'second series,' contains five essays. More than a third of the volume is devoted to a study of 'Dante,' elaborate and exhaustive—as the word 'exhaustive' might be used in speaking of an essay not of a book. Then follows a most sympathetic essay on 'Spenser,' together with papers on 'Milton,' 'Wordsworth,' and 'Keats.'

Of Lowell's critical writings as a whole it may be said that better reading does not exist; and among the virtues of these essays is their length. Lowell would have been ill at ease in the limits of three or four thousand words too often imposed by the editors of our current magazines. He might even have been scornful of a public taste which dictated to editors to dictate to their contributors limits so narrow. Writing from the fulness of a well-stored mind, he liked room in which to dis-

<sup>1</sup> The remarkable paper on Lincoln was afterwards transferred to the volume of *Political Essays*.



play his thought. Having much to say, he did not scruple to take time to say it; but the time always goes quickly. He understood perfectly the art of beguiling one into forgetting the hours as they pass.

These essays, so rich in critical suggestiveness, abound in matter-of-fact knowledge. We read for information and get it. Lowell shares with us the wealth of his acquaintance with books. His manner is unostentatious. Macaulay staggers us with his array of facts and his range of allusion. We are overwhelmed, intellectually cowed by the display of knowledge. Lowell too astonishes, but only after a while. Macaulay declaims at his reader, Lowell converses with him. All is so easy, good-humored, and witty, that the reader for a moment labors under the mistake of supposing that he is being instructed less than he would like. Later he begins to count up his mental gains, and is surprised at the display they make.

Another obvious source of pleasure is the felicity of expression. Lowell had the courage of his cleverness. Brilliancy was natural to him. He defended the practice of piquant phrasing, maintaining that a thought is not wanting in depth because it is strikingly put. Doubtless he loved an ingenious turn for its own sake, but it would be difficult to find an instance of his making a display of verbal vivacity to conceal poverty of thought.

## JAMES RUSSELL LOWELL

These pages bear constant witness to Lowell's passion for books, a passion too genuine and deep-seated to admit of any doubt on his part of the worth of literature. He had none of Emerson's scepticism, who held that if people would only think, they might do without books. The dullest proser and most leaden-winged poet could not make Lowell despair.

A number of essays display no little of the severity which we have learned to associate with reviewing after the manner of Jeffrey and Lockhart. Yet these caustic passages were written by a man who said of himself that he had 'to fight the temptation to be too good-natured.' Priggishness was as absurd to him in scholarship and letters as elsewhere, and he never lost a chance to give it a touch of the whip. Happily there is little of this. Lowell was almost uniformly urbane, gracious, reasonable.

If his subject was a great one Lowell treated it in a great way; if circumscribed and provincial he enlarged its boundaries—as in the essay on 'James Gates Percival,' where a subject of small intrinsic worth becomes a study of the American literary mind at one of its periods of acute self-consciousness, useful historically and tending to present-day edification. Needless to say, Lowell enjoyed handling this topic. He liked to satirize the early American authors and critics, solemn and important over their great work of inaugurating a New-

## POLITICAL ADDRESSES

World literature and quite convinced that, since 'that little dribble of the Avon had succeeded in producing William Shakespeare,' something unusual was to be expected of the Mississippi River.

Although Lowell's standing as a critic rests on such writings as his 'Dryden,' 'Shakespeare,' 'Chaucer,' 'Spenser,' 'Pope,' and 'Dante,' the amateur of good literature cannot afford to neglect anything to which this fine scholar put his hand.

The later volumes contain some of his most illuminating criticism (notably in the 'Fielding,' 'Don Quixote,' 'Gray,' 'Walton,' and 'Landor'), and his style seems the perfection of ease and suppleness. Doubtless it is negligent now and then, but always with the winning negligence of a master in the difficult art of expression.

## VII

### POLITICAL ADDRESSES AND PAPERS

*The Anti-Slavery Papers* consists of editorial articles reprinted from 'The Pennsylvania Freeman,' and 'The Anti-Slavery Standard.'<sup>1</sup> Witty, ironical, and pungent, these fugitive leaves are of value for the light they throw on the history of the struggle maintained by the Abolitionists against their powerful enemies both in the North and in

<sup>1</sup> January, 1845, to November, 1850.

the South, as well as for the idea they give of the militant Lowell at a time when to conviction of the justness of the cause for which he fought was added a measure of joyousness in the mere act of fighting.

Of greater significance is the volume of *Political Essays*, twelve papers written at intervals between 1858 and 1866. Designed for the most part to serve an immediate purpose, and betraying in every page the writer's depth of feeling, intensity of patriotism, and strong but not bigoted Northern convictions, these essays, by their acuteness of insight, balanced judgment, admirable temper, and wealth of allusion, as well as by their literary flavor and their occasional eloquence, hold a permanent place not only among Lowell's best writings but among the best of the innumerable political papers called out by the Civil War.

Of Lowell's later political utterances none is more notable than the address on 'Democracy,' delivered at Birmingham in 1884, a cleverly phrased and thoughtful speech in which the American minister defended the democratic idea with logic as adroit as it was sound. That the source of American democracy was the English constitution must have been news to a part at least of his English audience. It was a happy thought of Lowell's to show how stable democracy might be as a system of government. He made the argument from expediency, that 'it is cheaper in the long run to lift men up

## POLITICAL ADDRESSES

‘than to hold them down, and that a ballot in their hands is less dangerous to society than a sense of wrong in their heads.’ He would not have been Lowell had he not also shown that a democracy has its finer instincts, or failed to recognize the fact that as an experiment in the art of government it must stand or fall by its own merits. And the whole address is strongly optimistic, in its insistence that ‘those who have the divine right to govern will be found to govern in the end.’

The address on ‘The Place of the Independent in Politics’ supplements the Birmingham address. As Lowell before an English audience had dwelt on ‘the good points and favorable aspect of democracy,’ so before a home audience he discussed its weak points and its dangers. He thought the system would bear investigation. At no time did he labor under the mistake of supposing that democracy was a contrivance which ran of its own accord. Parties there must be and politicians to look after them, but it is no less essential that there should be somebody to look after the politicians. The address is a plea for unselfishness in political action.

Admirers of Lowell find it easy to believe that of all American makers of verse he had the most of what is called inspiration. With less catholic tastes he might have become a greater poet and would undoubtedly have been a finer artist. But

## *JAMES RUSSELL LOWELL*

granting that it was a matter of choice, and that Lowell had elected to make mastery in verse (with all the sacrifices involved) the object of his life, how serious then would have been the loss to criticism and to politics. The Lowell we know, with his extraordinary mental vivacity, his grasp of a multitude of interests that make for culture, is surely a more engaging figure than the hypothetical Lowell of purely poetical achievement.



XIX

*Walt Whitman*



# Walt Whitman

## I

### HIS LIFE

**W**ALTER WHITMAN (commonly known as Walt) was born at West Hills, a village in Huntington Township, Long Island, on May 31, 1819. He was a son of Walter Whitman, a carpenter and house-builder, who followed his trade chiefly in New York and Brooklyn. The Long Island Whitmans claim descent from the Reverend Zechariah Whitman, who came to America in 1635, and settled at Milford, Connecticut. Zechariah's son Joseph crossed the Sound 'sometime 'before 1660,' and may have been the original purchaser of the farm where successive generations of his descendants lived, and where the poet was born.

Blended with this English blood was that of a line of Dutch ancestors. Whitman's mother, Louisa Van Velsor, daughter of Cornelius Van

John Burroughs: *Notes on Walt Whitman as Poet and Person*, second edition, 1871.

R. M. Bucke: *Walt Whitman*, 1883.

W. S. Kennedy: *Reminiscences of Walt Whitman*, 1896.

I. H. Platt: *Walt Whitman*, 'Beacon Biographies,' 1904.

## WALT WHITMAN

Velsor of Cold Spring Harbor, was of 'the old 'race of the Netherlands, so deeply grafted on 'Manhattan Island and in Kings and Queens 'counties.' The Van Velsors were noted for their horses, and in her youth Louisa was a daring rider.

Whitman's education was such as a Brooklyn public school of the early Thirties afforded. After a little experience as an office-boy he learned to set type. To vary the monotony of life at the composing-case he taught in country schools or worked at farming. Occasionally he dabbled in literature, publishing tales and essays in the 'Democratic 'Review.' In 1839 he started at Huntington a 'weekly ' paper, the 'Long Islander,' publishing it at such intervals as pleased him best. For a time he edited the 'Brooklyn Eagle' (1848), diverting himself in the intervals of journalistic work with 'an occasional shy at "poetry."'

Nomadic by instinct and of a curious and inquiring turn of mind, Whitman, accompanied by his brother Jeff, made 'a leisurely journey and working expedition' through the Middle States, down the Ohio and Mississippi to New Orleans, returning in the same deliberate manner by the Great Lakes, Lower Canada, and the Hudson. During his stay in New Orleans (1849-50) he was an editorial writer on the 'Crescent.' In Brooklyn (1850-51) he edited and published a paper called 'The 'Freeman,' then for three or four years he built and sold small houses.

## WHITMAN'S LIFE

The first edition of the extraordinary and notorious *Leaves of Grass* (for which Whitman himself helped to set the type) appeared in 1855, and was described by Emerson to Carlyle as 'a nondescript monster, which yet had terrible eyes and buffalo strength, and was indisputably American.' An enlarged edition appeared in 1856, to be followed by yet a third in 1860. The sales were slow and the reviews for the most part hostile and often abusive.

There was some discussion in the Whitman family over the merits of the book. The poet's brother, George Whitman, said in after years: 'I remember mother comparing Hiawatha to Walt's, and the one seemed to us pretty much the same muddle as the other. Mother said if Hiawatha was poetry, perhaps Walt's was.'<sup>1</sup>

In 1862 George Whitman was wounded at the first battle of Fredericksburg. Walt went immediately to the front to care for him. His sympathies were enlisted by the sight of the misery on every hand and he became a volunteer army nurse, serving for three years in the hospitals in Washington. 'He saved many lives' was the testimony of a surgeon who had observed Whitman at his work. But his powerful physique broke under the strain, and a severe illness followed.

When he recovered, a clerkship was given him

<sup>1</sup> 'Conversations with George W. Whitman,' *In Re Walt Whitman*, p. 36.

in the Department of the Interior; he was presently removed on the charge (it is said) of having written an indecent book.<sup>1</sup> A place was immediately found for him in the Attorney General's office, and this place he held until he was stricken by partial paralysis early in 1873.

From 1873 until his death Whitman lived in Camden, New Jersey, at first making his home with his soldier brother, George, later setting up an establishment of his own at 328 Mickle Street. He never married, having an 'overmastering passion for entire freedom, unconstraint; I had 'an instinct against forming ties that would bind 'me.'

The following list of Whitman's writings conveys no idea of the interest attaching to them as bibliographical curiosities, but will perhaps answer the needs of the student.

*Leaves of Grass*, 1855 (second edition, 1856; third, 1860-61; fourth, 1867; fifth, 1871); *Walt Whitman's Drum-Taps and its Sequel*, 1865-66; *Democratic Vistas*, 1871; *After All not to Create Only*, 1871; *Passage to India*, 1871; *As a Strong*

<sup>1</sup> ' . . . It is therefore deemed needful only to say in relation 'to his [Whitman's] removal, that his Chief — Hon. Wm. P. 'Dole, Commissioner of Indian affairs, who was officially answer- 'able to me for the work in his Bureau, recommended it, *on the* 'ground that his services were not needed. And no other reason 'was ever assigned by my authority.' Extract from a letter from James Harlan to Dewitt Miller, dated Mt. Pleasant, Iowa, July 18, 1894.



## WHITMAN'S LIFE

*Bird on Pinions Free*, 1872; *Memoranda during the War*, 1875-76; *Two Rivulets* (prose and verse), 1876; *Specimen Days and Collect*, 1882-83; *November Boughs* (prose and verse), 1888; *Good-Bye My Fancy*, 1891; *Calamus: A Series of Letters . . . to a young friend* (Peter Doyle), 1897; *The Wound Dresser*, 1898.

The storm of opposition which greeted Whitman's earlier work gradually subsided, and he became a notable figure among contemporary men of letters. He was invited to read original poems on public occasions, such as the opening of the American Institute (1871), the Commencement at Dartmouth College (1872), and the Commencement at Tufts College (1874). In later years he enjoyed literary canonization in a small way. Many pilgrims visited the bard in his unpoetical house in Camden. Worshippers came from England to pay him homage and incidentally to rail at Americans for neglecting one of their few geniuses, stolidly ignoring the fact that they themselves had neglected not a few of their many geniuses. And before Walt Whitman died (March 26, 1892) he had tasted some of the delights of fame.

## II

## THE GROWTH OF A REPUTATION

BEING prejudiced in favor of metre and rhyme, probably from long experience of verse written in the conservative way, an old-fashioned world did not welcome *Leaves of Grass* with enthusiasm. A few discerning spirits saw in Whitman the promise of mighty things. Emerson greeted him 'at the beginning of a great career;' but when the poet had these words from a private letter stamped in gilt capitals on the cover of his next volume, Emerson (it is thought) was a little dismayed.

Not only did the form of the poems offend, but the content as well. There were lines calculated to disconcert even such people as were not, in their own opinion, prudish. The lines were comparatively few in number, but they were there in unabashed nakedness, and *Leaves of Grass*, it may be assumed, often went on a top shelf instead of on the sitting-room table along with innocuous poets like Tennyson and Longfellow.

Neglect and abuse raised up for Whitman in time a small battalion of champions, fierce, determined, uncompromising, militant. Among them were men whose attitude towards literature was catholic and liberal. For the most part they were

## GROWTH OF HIS FAME

Whitmanites, hot as lovers, quarrelsome as bullies, biting their thumbs at every passer-by.

Literary championship has one good effect: it keeps the public, gorged with novels of the day, from quite going to sleep. There is always a chance that some open-minded reader will be stirred by the clash of critical arms to look into the affair that is causing so great a pother. Better to be advertised by the crowd of swashbucklers who clattered about wearing Whitman's colors than not to be advertised at all. The public concluded that a man who could inspire loyalty like this must be worth while. Whitman's audience and influence grew. The bodyguard pretty much lost the power to see virtue in any poet save its own, but it had succeeded in arresting public attention.

In 1876 a number of English admirers subscribed freely to the new edition of Whitman's writings and garnished their guineas with comfortable words. The poet was sick, poor, discouraged, and by his own grateful testimony this show of interest put new heart into him — 'saved my life,' he said. It might well have had that effect, since no less names than those of Tennyson, Ruskin, Rossetti, and Lord Houghton were to be found in the list of subscribers. Even Robert Buchanan, who assailed with virulence the author of 'Jenny,' had no scruple in bidding God speed to the author of the 'Song of Myself' and 'Children of Adam.'

A momentary set-back occurred in 1882, when

## WALT WHITMAN

Whitman's Boston publisher was threatened with prosecution. 'The official mind' declared that it would be content if two poems were suppressed, the poems in question resembling in some particulars the stories an English editor omitted from the *Thousand-and-One Nights*, on the ground that they were 'interesting only to Arabs and old gentlemen.' Whitman refused to omit so much as a word, and the book was transferred to a Philadelphia publishing house.

After 1882 Whitman found himself able to publish freely and without the fear of the district attorney before his eyes. Since his death he has been accorded a niche in the American literary pantheon, if we may believe the critics, who now treat his work with the confidence which marks their attitude towards Lowell or Longfellow.

### III

#### THE WRITER

UNLESS indeed, as some maintain, Whitman got the suggestion of a rhapsodical form from the once famous *Poems of Ossian*, he may be said to have invented his own 'verse.' These unrhymed and unmetred chants give a pleasure the degree of which is largely determined by the reader's willingness to allow Whitman to speak in his own

## THE WRITER

manner and wholly without reference to time-honored modes of poetic expression. Such receptivity of mind is indispensable.

Whitman called his rhapsodies 'poems,' 'chants,' or 'songs' indifferently; the last term was a favorite with him, in later editions; he has a 'Song of the Open Road,' a 'Song of the Broad-Axe,' a 'Song for Occupations,' a 'Song of the Rolling Earth,' a 'Song of Myself,' a 'Song of the Exposition,' a 'Song of the Redwood-Tree,' 'Songs of Parting,' and yet more songs. Obviously he used the word without reference to the traditional meaning. Says Whitman: '. . . it is not on *Leaves of Grass* distinctively as *literature*, or a specimen thereof, that I feel to dwell, or advance claims. 'No one will get at my verses who insists upon 'viewing them as a literary performance, or attempt 'at such performance, or as aiming mainly toward 'art or æstheticism.' Holding as he did that so long as 'the States' were dominated by the poetic ideals of the Old World they would stop short of first-class nationality, his own practice necessarily involved getting rid, first of all, of the forms in which poetry had hitherto found expression.

That the structure of Whitman's rhapsodies is determined by some law cannot be questioned. After one has read these pieces many times, he will find himself instinctively expecting a certain cadence. The change of a word spoils it, the introduction of a rhyme is intolerable. They who

## WALT WHITMAN

are versed in Whitman's style can probably detect at once a variation from his best manner. That his peculiarities in the arrangement of words are very subtle is plain from a glance at the numerous and generally unsuccessful parodies of *Leaves of Grass*. The parodists have not grasped Whitman's secret. Merely to write in irregular lines and begin each line with a capital is to represent only the obvious and superficial side. Whitman is inimitable even in his catalogues. The ninth stanza of 'I Sing the Body Electric' reads like an extract from a papal anathema, but it has the Whitmanesque quality ; no one can reproduce it. The imitations of Whitman are always amusing and often ingenious, but they are not, like Lewis Carroll's 'Three Voices,' true parodies.

Whitman probably did not know every step of the process by which he attained his results. He was a poet who created his own laws and had no philosophy of poetic form to expound.

## IV

### LEAVES OF GRASS

A FIRST impression of *Leaves of Grass* is of uncouthness and blatancy, together with something yet more objectionable. The writer would seem to be a man fond of shocking what are called the pro-



prieties, so frank and egregious is his animalism, so overpowering his self-assertiveness.

The author of *Laus Veneris* accuses Whitman of indecency. The charge is a grave one and emanates from a high source. The distinguished English poet admits that there are few subjects which 'may not be treated with success;' but the treatment is everything. This is 'a radical and fundamental truth of criticism.' Whitman's indecency then consists not so much in the choice of the subject as in the awkwardness of the touch. Or as Swinburne puts it with characteristic emphasis: 'Under the dirty paws of a harper whose plectrum is a muck-rake any tune will become a chaos of discords, though the motive of the tune should be the first principle of nature — the passion of man for woman or the passion of woman for man.'

But along with that first impression of Whitman's verse as the product of a strong, coarse nature, wilfully brutal at times, comes the no less marked impression that the man is serenely honest, and animated by a benevolence which helps to relieve the brutality of its most repulsive features. At all events, Whitman is what Carlyle might have described as 'one of the palpablest of Facts in this miserable world where so much is Invertebrate and Phantasmal.' Whether we like him or not, Whitman is by no means one of those neutral literary persons who are in danger of being overlooked.

## WALT WHITMAN

In fact, the word 'literary' as applied to the author of *Leaves of Grass* is singularly inept. Whitman is not literary, that is to say he is not a product of libraries. No meek and reverent follower of poets gone before is this. 'He has no 'literary ancestor, he is an ancestor himself' — or at least takes the attitude of one. He is a son of earth, a genuine autochthon, naked and not ashamed, noisy, vociferous, naïvely delighted with the music of his own raucous voice.

In that first great rhapsody, 'Poem of Walt 'Whitman, an American,'<sup>1</sup> we have the most characteristic expression of his genius. He proclaims his interest in all that concerns mankind — not a cold, objective interest merely, he is himself a part of the mighty pageant of life, sympathetic with every phase of joy and sorrow, identifying himself with high and low, finding nothing mean or contemptible. He states the idea with a hundred variations, returns upon it, sets it in new lights, enforces it. Every phenomenon of human life teaches this lesson. Every pleasure, every grief, every experience small or great concerns him. He identifies himself with the life of the most miserable of creatures :—

I am possess'd !  
Embody all presences outlaw'd or suffering,  
See myself in prison shaped like another man,  
And feel the dull unintermitted pain.

<sup>1</sup> So called in the edition of 1856. In the edition of 1897 it is entitled 'Song of Myself.'

## LEAVES OF GRASS

He carries the process of identification too far at times, leading to results that would be disgusting were they not laughably grotesque. Whitman makes no reservations on the score of taste.

This doctrine of the unity of being and experience is comprehensive, not limited to human life; the brute and insentient existences are included as well. For a statement of Whitman's creed take the poem beginning: 'There was a child went forth.' If a busy man were ambitious to know something about Whitman's poetry and had only a minimum of time to give to the subject (like Franklin when he undertook to post up on revealed religion), one would not hesitate to commend to his notice this poem as one of the first to be read. The theme is contained in the four introductory lines. All that follows is an amplification of a single thought:—

There was a child went forth every day,  
And the first object he look'd upon, that object he became,  
And that object became part of him for the day, or a certain  
part of the day,  
Or for many years or stretching cycles of years.

Every object grows incorporate with the child, an essential inseparable part of him, — the early lilacs, the noisy brood of the barnyard, people, home, the family usages, doubts even (doubts 'whether that which appears is so, or is it all 'flashes and specks?'), the streets, the shops, the crowd surging along, shadows and mist, and boats and waves,

## WALT WHITMAN

The strata of color'd clouds, the long bar of maroon-tint away  
solitary by itself, the spread of purity it lies motionless in,  
The horizon's edge, the flying sea-crow, the fragrance of salt  
marsh and shore mud,  
These became part of that child who went forth every day, and  
who now goes, and will always go forth every day.

The idea has another setting in 'Salut au  
'Monde,' Walt Whitman's brotherly wave of the  
hand to the whole world. It is a vision of king-  
doms and nations, comprehensive, detailed; it is  
geography and the catalogue raised to the dignity  
of eloquence. Latitude and longitude and the hot  
equator 'banding the bulge of the earth' acquire  
new meaning in this strange chant. The poet hears  
the myriad sound of the life of all peoples:—

I hear the Arab muezzin calling from the top of the mosque,  
I hear the Christian priests at the altars of their churches, I  
hear the responsive bass and soprano,

I hear the Hebrew reading his records and psalms,  
I hear the rhythmic myths of the Greeks, and the strong legends  
of the Romans,

I hear the tale of the divine life and the bloody death of the  
beautiful God the Christ,

I hear the Hindoo teaching his favorite pupil the loves, wars,  
adages, transmitted safely to this day from poets who  
wrote three thousand years ago.

The mountains, the rivers, the stormy seas, the  
pageant of fallen empires and ancient religions,  
of cities and plains, all sweep past in this survey  
of the world. And to all, salutation:—

My spirit has pass'd in compassion and determination around  
the whole earth,

I have look'd for equals and lovers and found them ready for  
me in all lands,

I think some divine rapport has equalized me with them.

## LEAVES OF GRASS

The 'Song of the Open Road,' which may very well be read next, is a challenge to a larger life than that which conventions, and modes, and common social habits will permit : —

From this hour I ordain myself loos'd of limits and imaginary  
lines,  
Going where I list, my own master total and absolute,  
Listening to others, considering well what they say,  
Pausing, searching, receiving, contemplating,  
Gently, but with undeniable will, divesting myself of the holds  
that would hold me.

It is no journey of ease to which the poet invites his followers ; he offers none of the 'old  
'smooth prizes : ' —

My call is the call of battle, I nourish active rebellion,  
He going with me must go well arm'd,  
He going with me goes often with spare diet, poverty, angry  
enemies, desertion.

Notable among Whitman's best poems, and most important to an understanding of him, is the 'Song of the Answerer,' that is to say, of the Poet. He it is who puts things in their right relations : —

Every existence has its idiom, every thing has an idiom and a  
tongue,  
He resolves all tongues into his own and bestows it upon  
men.

The Answerer is quite other than the Singer — he is more powerful, his existence is more significant, his words are of weight and insight : —



## WALT WHITMAN

The words of the singers are the hours or minutes of the light  
or dark, but the words of the maker of poems are the  
general light and dark,

The maker of poems settles justice, reality, immortality,  
His insight and power encircle things and the human race,  
He is the glory and extract thus far of things and of the human race.

In that fine rhapsody 'By Blue Ontario's  
'Shore' Whitman restates his doctrine while applying it to the need of his own America:—

Rhymes and rhymers pass away, poems distill'd from poems  
pass away,

The swarms of reflectors and the polite pass, and leave ashes,  
Admirers, importers, obedient persons, make but the soil of  
literature,

America justifies itself, give it time, no disguise can deceive  
it or conceal from it, it is impassive enough,

Only toward the likes of itself will it advance to meet them,  
If its poets appear it will in due time advance to meet them,  
there is no fear of mistake,

(The proof of a poet shall be sternly deferr'd till his country  
absorbs him as affectionately as he has absorb'd it.)

'By Blue Ontario's Shore,' from which these  
lines are taken, is a chant for America. Patriotism  
is Whitman's darling theme. Love of native land,  
confidence in democracy, the self-sufficiency of  
the Republic and the certainty of its future—  
with these ideas and with this spirit his verse is  
charged to the full:—

A breed whose proof is in time and deeds,  
What we are we are, nativity is answer enough to objections,  
We wield ourselves as a weapon is wielded,  
We are powerful and tremendous in ourselves,  
We are executive in ourselves, we are sufficient in the variety  
of ourselves,



## LEAVES OF GRASS

We are the most beautiful to ourselves and in ourselves,  
We stand self-pois'd in the middle, branching thence over the  
world,  
From Missouri, Nebraska, or Kansas, laughing attacks to  
scorn.

America is safe, thought Whitman, so long as she  
does her own work in her own way and cultivates  
a wholesome fear of civilization.

America, curious toward foreign characters, stands by its own  
at all hazards,  
Stands removed, spacious, composite, sound, initiates the  
true use of precedents,  
Does not repel them or the past or what they have produced  
under their forms,

. . . . .  
These States are the amplest poem,  
Here is not merely a nation but a teeming Nation of nations,  
Here the doings of men correspond with the broadcast doings  
of the day and night,  
Here is what moves in magnificent masses careless of particu-  
lars,  
Here are the roughs, beards, friendliness, combativeness, the  
soul loves,  
Here the flowing trains, here the crowds, equality, diversity,  
the soul loves.

One of the most magnificent of Whitman's  
patriotic chants is that known by its opening line,  
'As a Strong Bird on Pinions Free.' He would  
be a hardened sceptic who, after reading these  
superb and uplifting verses, found himself still  
unconverted to some portion of the gospel of  
poetry as preached by Walt Whitman. There is  
no resisting the man here; or when he shows his  
power in pieces like 'Proud Music of the Storm,'  
'Passage to India,' 'The Mystic Trumpeter,'

‘With Husky-Haughty Lips, O Sea!’ ‘To the  
 ‘Man-of-War-Bird,’ ‘Song of the Universal,’ and  
 ‘Chanting the Square Deific.’

Admirable, even wonderful, as these verses are, it may be after all that the little volume called *Drum-Taps* (together with its *Sequel*) is Whitman’s best gift to the literature of his country. Vivid pictures of battle-field, camp, and hospital, they are not to be forgotten by him who has once looked on them. The ‘Prelude,’ ‘Cavalry Crossing a Ford,’ ‘By the Bivouac’s Fitful Flame,’ ‘The Dresser,’ the impressive ‘Vigil strange I kept on the field one night,’ and the no less striking ‘A march in the ranks hard-prest, and the road unknown,’ together with ‘As toilsome I wander’d Virginia’s woods,’ the ‘Hymn of Dead Soldiers,’ and ‘Spirit whose Work is Done,’ — these and many more have accomplished for Whitman’s reputation what the ‘Song of Myself’ and kindred poems could not.

In *Drum-Taps* appeared the tributes to Lincoln, ‘O Captain, my Captain,’ and the great lament beginning ‘When lilacs last in the dooryard bloom’d.’ Here the poet rises to his supreme height. For pathos and tenderness, for beauty of phrase, nobility of thought, and a grand yet simple manner this threnody is indeed worthy of the praise bestowed on it by those critics whose praise is most to be desired.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Stedman’s tribute in *Poets of America*.

*SPECIMEN DAYS AND COLLECT*

WHITMAN'S prose in the definitive edition makes a stout volume of more than five hundred closely printed pages. The title, *Specimen Days and Collect*, gives an imperfect hint of the contents. Here are extracts from journals kept through twenty years. Many bear a resemblance to Hugo's *Choses Vues*. Largely autobiographical and reminiscent, they are vivid, picturesque, and far better in their haphazard way than a good deal of formal 'literature.' Here are reprints of prefaces to the several editions of *Leaves of Grass*, together with papers on Burns, Tennyson, and Shakespeare, a lecture on Lincoln, a paper on American national literature, and yet more 'diary-notes' and 'splinters.' He who loves to browse in a book will find the volume of Whitman's prose made to his hand. The prose is of high importance to an understanding of what, oddly enough, his poetry imperfectly reveals — Whitman's character. To know the man as he really was we must read *Specimen Days and Collect*.

## VI

## WHITMAN'S CHARACTER

THERE is a certain uncanny quality in parts of Whitman's verse. The reiteration of particular phrases and words awakens an uncomfortable feeling, a suspicion of not-to-be-named queernesses, to use no plainer term. The constant translation of conceptions of ideal love into fleshly symbols moves the reader to irreverence if not to disgust. Whitman's favorite image of bearded 'comrades' who kiss when they meet, and who take long walks with their arms around each other's necks, may be 'nonchalant' but it is not agreeable. Somehow it does not seem as if the doctrine of the brotherhood of man gained many supporters by so singular a method of propagandism.

When from time to time Whitman talked with Peter Doyle about his books, Doyle would say: 'I don't know what you are trying to get at.'<sup>1</sup> It is an ironical comment on the great preacher of the needs and virtues of the average man that his poetry should have been handed over to the keeping of those whose jaded taste makes them hanker after the bizarre, after anything that breeds discussion, anything demanding interpretation and defence.

<sup>1</sup> *Calamus*, p. 27.

## WHITMAN'S CHARACTER

Yet no one doubts the sincerity of these faithful followers. Whitmanites really like Whitman albeit they protest too much. It is difficult to read him and not like him. Unfortunately the many find it impossible to read him. Whitman prepares his feast, throws open his doors, and bids all enter who will. A few come and by their shrill volubility make it seem as if the dining-room were crowded. The majority do not trouble to cross the threshold. They have heard that the host serves queer dishes; it has even been reported that he is a cannibal.

This, or something very like it, has been Whitman's fate. A taste for his work must be acquired. He is the idol of cliques and societies, and a meaningless name to the great people whom he loved, whose virtues he chanted with confident fervor, and in whom he trusted unreservedly.

Poetry so egoistic might be supposed to reveal the man. Strangely enough, Whitman's poetry, despite the heavy and continued accentuation of the personal note, gives but a partial, a quite imperfect view of the man himself. Whitman tells us so emphatically what he *thinks* that we are at a loss to know what he himself *is*. The great Shakespeare, according to popular opinion, is veiled from us through his extraordinary impersonality. Whitman accomplishes a not dissimilar end by diametrically opposite means; he hides himself by over obtrusion of the personal element. The case

## WALT WHITMAN

is not so common as to be undeserving of study. As a method it has many drawbacks.

Whitman has suffered at his own hands. The egoistic manner, indispensable to his theory and not to be taken with literalness, is nevertheless a stumbling-block. Instruct themselves how they will that in saying 'I' the poet also means 'You,' that whatever Walt Whitman claims for himself he also claims for every one else, readers somehow lose hold of the thought and are amazed and angered by the poet's monstrous vanity.

To this feeling the prose writings are an antidote. We learn in a few pages how simple-minded, patient, and lovable this man really was; how reverent of genius, how free from envy, undisturbed by suffering, ill-repute, and delayed hopes. There was something at once pathetic and noble in his patience, in his magnificent repose and stability. The impersonal character of the tree and the rock, which he admired so much, became in a measure his. He bided his time. The success of other poets awakened no jealousy. He never called names, never picked flaws in the work of his brother bards. The better we know him the more dignified and lofty his figure becomes.



## *Index*



# Index

- Abbotsford and Newstead Abbey*, 9, 27.  
 Abolitionists, 260.  
*Afloat and Ashore*, 71, 88.  
*Aftermath*, 226, 245.  
 'Ages, The,' Bryant's Phi Beta Kappa poem, 38.  
 Agnew, Mary, 406.  
*Alhambra, The*, 9, 24.  
 Allan, Mr. and Mrs. John, befriend Poe, 190, 191.  
 Allegiance, treaty with Germany concerning, 107.  
 American Anti-Slavery Society in New York, Whittier secretary of, 260.  
*American Democrat, The*, 70, 94.  
*American Lands and Letters*, 449.  
 American Loyalists, Irving's attitude towards, 30; in Westchester County, N. Y., 75.  
*American Note-Books of Nathaniel Hawthorne*, 292, 315.  
 'American Scholar, The,' Emerson's Phi Beta Kappa oration, 152, 162.  
*Among My Books*, 458, 475, 476.  
*Among the Hills*, 263, 280.  
 Amory, Susan, wife of William Hickling Prescott, 125.  
 'Analectic Magazine,' conducted by Irving, 6.  
 André, Major John, Irving's treatment of, 29.  
 Anti-slavery movement, Whittier's connection with, 259, 273-277; Thoreau's, 331; Curtis's, 420, 421; Lowell's, 456, 466, 479.  
*Anti-Slavery Papers*, Lowell's, 459, 479.  
 Appleton, Frances, wife of Longfellow, 225, 226.  
 Archæological Institute of America, 383.  
 Armada, the, 374.  
 Arnold, Benedict, Irving's treatment of, 29.  
 Arnold, Matthew, 232.  
 Astor, John Jacob, his commerical enterprise in the Northwest, the subject of *Astoria*, 28.  
*At Sundown*, 263, 282.  
 'Atlantic Monthly,' founding of, and Whittier's contributions to, 262; Lowell editor of, 458.  
*Autocrat, The, of the Breakfast-Table*, 340, 345, 355.  
*Autumn*, Thoreau's, 324, 331.  
 Bachiler, Stephen, 256.  
 Bancroft, Aaron, father of George Bancroft, 101.  
 Bancroft, George: his ancestry, 101; education and foreign travel, 102; tutor at Harvard, 103; the Round Hill School, 103; early works, 104; political appointments, 105, 107; founds United States Naval Academy, 105; brings about treaty with Germany, 107; last years, 107; death, 108; character, 108; criticism of the History, 110-119.  
 'Barbara Frietchie,' remark of Whittier concerning, 265; popularity of, 276.  
*Battle Summer*, 440, 444.  
*Belfry, The, of Bruges*, 225, 236.  
 Benjamin, Mary, wife of John Lothrop Motley, 360; her death, 364.  
 Bigelow, Catharine, wife of Francis Parkman, 381.  
*Biglow Papers, The*, 456, 458, 466.  
 Bismarck, his student life with Motley, 360.

# INDEX

- Bliss, Elisabeth (Davis), wife of George Bancroft, 105.  
*Blithedale Romance, The*, 291, 309.  
*Bonneville*, 28.  
*Book of the Roses*, 381 (note).  
 Borrow, George, Emerson's knowledge of, 182.  
 Boston Lyceum, Poe's appearance before, 197, 200.  
*Bracebridge Hall*, 7, 17.  
*Bravo, The*, 69, 89, 96.  
 'Broadway Journal, The,' Poe's connection with, 196.  
 Bronson, W. C., quoted, on Bryant, 43.  
 Brook Farm, Emerson's sympathy with, 154; Hawthorne's connection with, 289.  
 Brown, John, Thoreau's acquaintance with, 323.  
 Bryant, Peter, father of William Cullen Bryant, 35.  
 Bryant, Stephen, ancestor of William Cullen Bryant, 35.  
 Bryant, William Cullen: his ancestry, 35; early verses, 36; education, 36, 37; law practice, 37; marriage, 38; editorial work, 38-41; political affiliations, 39, 40; works published, 41; travel, 42; death, 43; character, 44; quarrel with an opponent, 45; criticism of his work, 46-62; his translations, 58; quoted, on Cooper's quarrel with the Press, 70.  
 Burr, Aaron, Washington Irving among counsel for defence of, 5.  
 Burroughs, John, 243.  
 'Burton's Gentleman's Magazine and American Monthly,' Poe's connection with, 194.  
 Byron, George Gordon Noel, visits American flagship, 103.  
 Cabot, Sebastian, passage on, from Bancroft, 110.  
 Cambridge (England), University of, confers degree on Holmes, 340; on Lowell, 459.  
*Cape Cod*, 324, 331.  
 Caraffa, Motley's picture of, 371.  
 Carlyle, Thomas, Emerson's meeting with, 150; correspondence with Emerson, 156; quotation from, applied to Whitman, 495.  
*Cathedral, The*, 458, 470.  
 Cavalier and Puritan, Bancroft's comparison of, 111.  
*Chainbearer, The*, 71, 95.  
 Champlain, Samuel, 392.  
 Charles the Fifth, Prescott's continuation of Robertson's history of, 127.  
*Children of the Lord's Supper, The*, 231, 236.  
*Christus, a Mystery*, 226, 245.  
 Civil Service reform, Curtis's work for, 421.  
 Clemm, Maria, 192, 194, 198.  
 Clemm, Virginia, 192; her marriage to Edgar Allan Poe, 193; her death, 197.  
 Clough, Arthur Hugh, effect on, of reading *Evangeline*, 232; visits America, 457.  
 Cogswell, Joseph G., 103.  
 Columbus, Irving's life of, 8, 20.  
*Commemoration Ode*, 458, 470.  
*Conduct of Life*, 156, 175.  
 Conkling, Roscoe, his attack on Curtis, 423.  
*Conquest, The, of Granada*, 8, 22.  
*Conquest, The, of Mexico*, 127, 134.  
*Conquest, The, of Peru*, 127, 138.  
*Conspiracy, The, of Pontiac*, 381, 387.  
 Constitution of the United States, history of, by Bancroft, 108.  
 Cooper, James Fenimore: his ancestry, 65; boyhood and education, 66; enters the navy, 66; marries and leaves the service, 67; his first books, 67; life abroad, 68; return to America, 69; quarrel with the Press, 69; list of works, 70; character, 72; style, 74; criticism of his works, 75-97.  
 Cooper, William, father of James Fenimore Cooper, 65.  
 Cortés, Prescott's estimate of, 136.

# INDEX

- Count Frontenac and New France under Louis XIV*, 382, 391, 393.
- Courtship of Miles Standish, The*, 226, 242.
- Craigie, Mrs., her reception of Longfellow, 224.
- Crater, The*, 71, 95.
- Croker, J. W., quoted, on Irving, 13.
- Curtis, George William: his ancestry, 417; education, 418; at Brook Farm and Concord, 418; foreign travel, 418; newspaper work, 419; the 'Easy Chair', 419; books published, 419, 422; orations, 420; marriage, 420; political work and Civil Service reform, 421; character, 423; style, 424; criticism of his works, 427-435.
- Curtis family, 417.
- Dante, Longfellow's translation of, 226, 249.
- Davis, Elisabeth, wife of George Bancroft, 105.
- Deerslayer, The*, 66, 71, 81.
- Defoe, Poe compared with, 203.
- De Lancey, Susan, wife of James Fenimore Cooper, 67; her family, 75.
- 'Democracy,' 480.
- 'Dial, The,' 153.
- Dickens, Charles, dinner to, in New York, 46; quotation from letter of, to Longfellow, 228; greeting to, by O. W. Holmes, 350.
- Divine Tragedy, The*, 226, 245.
- 'Divinity Address,' Emerson's, 152, 163.
- Dr. Grimshawe's Secret*, 292, 316.
- Doctor Johns*, 441, 448.
- Dolliver Romance, The*, 292, 316.
- Doyle, Peter, quoted, on Whitman, 504.
- Dream Life*, 440, 443, 447.
- Drum-Taps*, 488, 502.
- Duelling, Bryant's farce in ridicule of, 38.
- Dunlap, Frances, wife of James Russell Lowell, 457.
- Dutch life, Irving's treatment of, 32.
- Duyckinck, E. A., 42.
- Dwight, Sarah, wife of George Bancroft, 105.
- Early Spring in Massachusetts*, 324, 331.
- 'Easy Chair' papers, 419, 422, 425, 430.
- Edinburgh, University of, confers degree on Holmes, 341.
- El Dorado*, 403.
- Elsie Venner*, 340, 352.
- Embargo, The*, 36.
- Emerson, Ralph Waldo: his ancestry, 147; boyhood, 148; education, 149; ordination and withdrawal from the ministry, 149, 150; begins lecturing, 151; settles in Concord, 151; notable addresses, 152; connection with Transcendental movement, 152; lecture tour in England, 154; position on slavery, 155; list of his works, 155; visitor to West Point and overseer of Harvard, 156; nominated for Lord Rector of Glasgow University, 156; death, 157; character, 157; criticism of his works, 160-186; quoted, on Bancroft, 103, 109; club meetings in his library, 418; Holmes's life of, 354.
- Emerson family, 147.
- English Lands, Letters, and Kings*, 449.
- English Note-Books of Nathaniel Hawthorne*, 292, 315.
- English Traits*, 156, 173.
- Evangeline*, 225; metre of, 231; stimulating effect of, on Clough, 232; popularity of, 240.
- Everett, Alexander, influential in Irving's going to Spain, 8.
- Everett, Edward, 102.
- Excursions*, Thoreau's, 324, 330, 332.
- Fable, A, for Critics*, 456, 458, 468.
- Fairchild, Frances, wife of William Cullen Bryant, 38.
- Familiar Letters*, Thoreau's, 324, 326, 332.
- Fanshawe*, 288.

# INDEX

- Faust*, Taylor's translation of, 405, 410.
- Ferdinand and Isabella, Prescott's history of, 127, 131, 132.
- 'Fighting parson, the,' 148.
- Fireside Travels*, 459, 474.
- Fiske, John, cited, on Longfellow's treatment of Cotton Mather in *The New England Tragedies*, 247.
- Fitzgerald, Edward, 237.
- French and Italian Note-Books of Nathaniel Hawthorne*, 292, 315.
- Freeman, Edward A., quoted, 31.
- Fresh Gleanings*, 439, 443, 444.
- 'Frogpondians,' 200.
- Frontenac, Count, in the New World, 393.
- Fudge Doings*, 441, 445.
- Fuller, Margaret, 153; Emerson's *Memoirs* of, 156; her attack on Longfellow, 229; schoolmate of Holmes, 338.
- Gardiner, John, 124.
- Garnett, Richard, quoted, on Emerson, 185.
- Garrison, William Lloyd, his relations with Whittier, 257, 258.
- Gay, Sidney Howard, 42, 456.
- Giles Corey of the Salem Farms*, 246.
- Gleanings in Europe*, Cooper's, 94.
- Godwin, Parke, quoted, on Bryant, 44.
- Goethe, Emerson's estimate of, 173.
- 'Gold-Bug, The,' wins prize, 196.
- Golden Legend, The*, 225, 245, 246.
- Goldsmith, Irving's life of, 27; reference to his work, 449.
- 'Graham's Magazine,' Poe's connection with, 195.
- Grandfather's Chair*, 289, 300.
- Greeley, Horace, his advice to Taylor on writing letters of travel, 402.
- Green, John Richard, quoted, on Motley, 364.
- Greenough, Horatio, quotation from letter of, to Cooper, 93.
- Grissold, Rufus W., 196.
- Guardian Angel, The*, 340, 352.
- Guide, A, in the Wilderness*, 66 (note).
- Gulliver's Travels*, Irish bishop's remark concerning, 76.
- Half-Century, A, of Conflict*, 382, 391, 394.
- Hannah Thurston*, 405.
- Hansen, Marie, wife of Bayard Taylor, 406.
- Harlan, James, extract from letter of, concerning Walt Whitman's removal from government clerkship, 488 (note).
- 'Harper's Weekly' and 'Harper's Monthly,' Curtis's connection with, 419, 421, 422.
- Harrison, Frederic, his criticism of *Evangeline*, 251.
- Haweis, H. R., 460.
- Hawthorne, Nathaniel: his ancestry, 287; boyhood and college life, 288; his first book, 288; collector of the Port of Boston, 289; joins Brook Farm Community, 289; marriage, 290; Surveyor of Customs at Salem, 290; consul at Liverpool, 291; failing health and death, 293; his character, 293; style, 296; criticism of his works, 298-317; his refusal to write an Acadian story, 240.
- Hawthorne family, 287.
- 'Haverhill Gazette,' Whittier's connection with, 258, 259.
- Headsmen, The*, 69, 91.
- Heartsease and Rue*, 459, 473.
- Heidenmauer, The*, 69, 91.
- Henry, Prince, of Hohenneck, the subject of *The Golden Legend*, 246.
- 'Heroes, The,' 38.
- Hiawatha*, 225; the metre of, 232; popularity of, 240; sources and purpose of, 242.
- History, The, of the Navy of the United States of America*, 70, 93.
- History of the United Netherlands*, 362, 369, 373.
- Holmes, Abiel, father of Oliver Wendell Holmes, 337.
- Holmes, Oliver Wendell: his ancestry, 337; education, 338; professor at



# INDEX

- Dartmouth College, 338; marriage, 339; professor at Harvard, 339; contributions to the 'Atlantic Monthly,' 340; list of his works, 340; death, 341; character, 341; style, 344; criticism of his works, 345-355; his 'occasional' poems, 350; his fiction, 352; his biography, 354; quoted, on Longfellow, 230; his explanation of the ease of the metre of *Hiawatha*, 232.
- Home as Found*, 70, 92, 96.
- Home Ballads*, 263, 277.
- Home Pastorals, Ballads and Lyrics*, 405, 412.
- Homeward Bound*, 70, 92.
- House, The, of the Seven Gables*, 290, 305.
- Howadji, The, in Syria*, 419, 428.
- Howe, Judge Samuel, anecdote of, as Bryant's instructor in law, 37.
- Howells, William Dean, his description of Thoreau, 326.
- 'Hub of the Solar System,' 347.
- Hyperion*, 225, 233.
- In the Harbor*, 227, 250.
- In War Time*, 263, 276.
- Indian life as shown in Cooper's novels, 79-82; in *Hiawatha*, 242; in Parkman's histories, 380, 387-389.
- Ireland, Alexander, arranges lecturing trip for Emerson in England, 154.
- Irish Presbyterians in New Hampshire, 268.
- Irving, Peter, brother of Washington Irving, 5-7.
- Irving, Pierre M., makes first draft of *Astoria*, 27.
- Irving, Washington: his ancestry, 3; childhood and education, 4; early writings, 5-7; Secretary of American Legation in London, 8; Minister to Spain, 9, 10; political opportunities, 9; death, 10; character, 10; criticism of writings, 13-32; assists Bryant, 41; mention of Bryant's oration on, 43; reference to his style, 116.
- Irving, William, father of Washington Irving, 3.
- Irving, William T., brother of Washington Irving, 6.
- Ivry, battle of, 374.
- Jack Tar*, 71, 95.
- Jackson, Amelia, wife of O. W. Holmes, 339.
- Jackson, Lydia, wife of Ralph Waldo Emerson, 151.
- James, Henry, reference to his story, 'The Death of the Lion,' 297.
- Jameson, J. F., quoted, on Bancroft, 117 (note).
- Jesuits, The, in North America*, 382, 391, 392.
- John Endicott*, 246, 247.
- John Godfrey's Fortunes*, 405, 406.
- John of Barneveld*, 363, 369, 375.
- 'Jonathan Oldstyle' letters, 5.
- Jones, John Paul, 82.
- Journal, The, of Julius Rodman*, 204.
- Judas Maccabeus*, 248.
- Kavanagh*, 225, 235.
- Kennedy, John P., 193, 194.
- Kéramos*, 226, 250.
- Knickerbocker's New York*, 6, 14.
- Lafayette, defended by Cooper, 69; Emerson's meeting with, 150; visits David Poe's grave, 189.
- Lamb, Charles, 449.
- Lars*, 405, 412.
- La Salle and the Discovery of the Great West*, 382, 391, 392.
- Last, The, of the Mohicans*, 68, 79.
- Leather-Stocking Tales*, 77-81.
- Leaves of Grass*, 487, 490, 494, 503.
- Legends of New England*, 259, 261; Whittier's opinion of, 267; partial suppression of, 270.
- Legends of the Conquest of Spain*, 9, 26.
- Leggett, William, his attack on Irving, 12; assists Bryant in editing the 'New York Evening Post,' 39; Whittier pays tribute to, 269.

# INDEX

- Letter, A, to his Countrymen*, Cooper's, 70, 93.  
*Letters and Social Aims*, 156, 182.  
*Letters of a Traveller*, 41, 47.  
*Letters to Various Persons*, Thoreau's, 324.  
*Library of Poetry and Song*, Bryant's connection with, 42.  
Lincoln, Abraham, Lowell's tribute to, 471.  
Linze, Captain, 125.  
*Lionel Lincoln*, 68, 77.  
Lisfranc, Jacques, Holmes's feeling towards, 341.  
*Literary Recollections and Miscellanies*, Whittier's, 262, 269.  
Longfellow, Henry Wadsworth: his ancestry, 221; education and early poems, 222; professorship at Bowdoin, 223; marriage, 223; Harvard professorship, 224, 225; death of his wife, 224; occupancy of the Craiggie House, 224; second marriage, 225; lists of books published, 225, 226; death of Mrs. Longfellow, 226; honors conferred on Longfellow, 227; his death, 227; character, 228; poetical style, 230; criticism of his works, 233-250.  
*Lorgnette, The*, 440, 445, 446.  
*Lotus-Eating*, 419, 429.  
Louisbourg, siege of, 394.  
Lowell, James Russell: his ancestry, 453; education, 454; starts 'The Pioneer,' 454; first books, 455; connection with 'The National Anti-Slavery Standard,' 456; winter abroad, 456; death of Mrs. Lowell, 457; Harvard professor, 457; second marriage, 457; editor of 'Atlantic Monthly' and 'North American Review,' 458; list of books published, 458; Minister to Spain, 459; Minister to England, 460; last years, 460; character, 461; style, 463; criticism of his works, 465-482.  
Lowell family, 453.  
'Loyn Pythoness,' 259.  
*Mahomet and his Successors*, 9, 23.  
*Maine Woods, The*, 324, 330.  
'MS. Found in a Bottle,' wins prize, 193.  
*Marble Faun, The*, 291, 310.  
*Margaret Smith's Journal, Leaves from*, 262, 267, 268.  
*Masque, The, of Pandora*, 226, 248.  
*Masque, The, of the Gods*, 405, 413.  
Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society, its treatment of Emerson, 155.  
Mather, Cotton, Longfellow's treatment of, in *The New England Tragedies*, 247.  
*Mercedes of Castile*, 71, 92.  
*Merry-Mount*, 360, 361.  
*Michael Angelo*, 227, 248.  
*Miles Wallingford*, 71, 88.  
*Miriam*, 263, 280.  
Mitchell, Donald Grant: his ancestry and education, 439; his first book, 439; consul at Venice, 441; marriage, 441; list of his books, 441; editorial work and lecturing, 442; his character and literary style, 442; criticism of his works, 444-450.  
*Mogg Megone*, 261; Whittier's objection to reprinting, 266, 270.  
*Monikins, The*, 70, 92.  
Montaigne, as one of Emerson's *Representative Men*, 172.  
*Montcalm and Wolfe*, 382, 391, 395.  
Moody, Father, 148.  
'Morituri Salutamus,' anecdote of the reading of, at Bowdoin, 229.  
Morris, William, reference to his *Earthly Paradise*, 244.  
*Mortal Antipathy, A*, 340, 353.  
*Mosses from an Old Manse*, 290, 299.  
Motley, John Lothrop: his ancestry and education, 359; foreign study, 360; intimacy with Bismarck, 360; admission to the bar, 360; marriage, 360; publication of novels and essays, 360; Secretary to American Legation in St. Petersburg, 361; member of Massachusetts legislature, 361; residence abroad for historical study, 362; scholastic hon-

# INDEX

- ors, 363; Minister to Austria, 363; to England, 364; death, 364; his character, 365; style, 367; criticism of his histories, 369-376; Holmes's memoir of, 354.
- Murat, Achille, meets Emerson, 149.
- My Farm of Edgewood*, 441, 448.
- My Study Windows*, 458, 475.
- Napoleon, Emerson's estimate of, 172.
- Narrative, The, of Arthur Gordon Pym*, 194, 203.
- 'National Anti-Slavery Standard,' Lowell's connection with, 456.
- Natural History of Intellect*, 156, 183.
- Nature*, Emerson's, 151, 155, 160, 176.
- Ned Myers, 66, 71.
- Netherlands, Motley's history of, 362, 369, 373.
- 'Neutral ground, The,' 75.
- New England Tragedies, The*, 226, 245.
- 'New York Evening Post,' Bryant's connection with, 39.
- 'New York Review and Athenæum Magazine,' Bryant's editorship of, 38.
- Nile Notes of a Howadji*, 419, 427.
- 'North American Review,' Bryant's early contributions to, 37; Lowell's connection with, 458.
- Norton, Andrews, his disagreement with Emerson, 152.
- Oak Openings, The*, 71, 95.
- 'Old Manse, The,' 147; Hawthorne's occupancy of, 290.
- Old Portraits and Modern Sketches*, 262, 269.
- Old Régime, The*, 382, 391, 393.
- 'On a Certain Condescension in Foreigners,' 460.
- Oregon Trail, The*, 381, 387.
- Ossoli, Margaret Fuller. *See* Fuller, Margaret.
- Otsego Hall, home of the Coopers, 66, 69.
- Our Hundred Days in Europe*, 340, 348.
- Our Old Home*, 292; anecdote of the dedication of, to Franklin Pierce, 295; character of, 314.
- Outre-Mer*, 225, 233, 234.
- Over the Teacups*, 340, 348, 355.
- Oxford, University of, confers degree on Longfellow, 227; on Holmes, 340; on Motley, 363; on Lowell, 459.
- Parkman, Francis: his ancestry, 379; education, 380; interest in Indian life, 380; first book, 381; marriage, 381; ill health, 381; list of his works, 382; honors, 383; character, 383; literary style, 385; criticism of his works, 387-398.
- Parkman family, 379.
- Pastorius, Daniel, the subject of the *Pennsylvania Pilgrim*, 280.
- Pathfinder, The*, 67, 71, 81.
- Paulding, J. K., 6.
- Peabody, Sophia, wife of Nathaniel Hawthorne, 289.
- 'Penn Magazine, The,' projected by Poe, 195.
- Pennsylvania Hall, sacking of, by a pro-slavery mob, 260.
- Pennsylvania Pilgrim, The*, 263, 280.
- Phi Beta Kappa poem by Bryant, 38.
- Philip the Second, Bancroft's history of, 127, 131, 141; Motley's treatment of, 372-375.
- Picture, The, of St. John*, 405, 409, 412.
- Pierce, Franklin: his friendship with Hawthorne, 288, 293; Hawthorne's life of, 292.
- Pilot, The*, 67, 71, 82.
- 'Pioneer, The,' Lowell's magazine, 454.
- Pioneers, The*, 66, 67, 71, 77.
- Pioneers, The, of France in the New World*, 382, 391.
- Pizarro, Francisco, his exploits in Peru, 138.
- Pizarro, Gonzalo, his march across the Andes, 140.

# INDEX

- Plato, Emerson on, 171.
- Poe, Edgar Allan: his ancestry, 189; adoption by the Allans, 190; education, 190; enters West Point, 191; early writings, 192; marriage, 193; editorial work, 193; lecturing, 196; affair of the Boston Lyceum, 197, 200; death of his wife, 197; proposal of marriage to Mrs. Shelton, 198; death, 198; character, 198; style, 201; criticism of his works, 203-211; his work as a critic, 211-215; quality of his poetry, 215.
- Poems of Home and Travel*, 405, 410.
- Poems of the Orient*, 405, 411.
- Poe, The, at the Breakfast-Table*, 340, 347.
- Poetry, quality of, 49; Bryant's theory of, 48-50; Poe's, 213.
- Poe's Journal*, *The*, 405, 411.
- Poets and Poetry of Europe*, 225, 237.
- Potiphar Papers, The*, 419, 429.
- Potter, Mary Storer, wife of Longfellow, 223, 224.
- Prairie, The*, 68, 80.
- Precaution*, 67.
- Prentice, George, 259.
- Prescott, William Hickling: his ancestry, 123; education, 124; accident to his eyes, 125; marriage, 125; beginning of his literary work, 126; list of his works, 127; death, 127; character, 128; his style, 130; criticism of his works, 132-143; his aid to Motley, 361.
- Prescott family, 123.
- Prince Deukalion*, 405, 413.
- Professor, The, at the Breakfast-Table*, 340, 347.
- Prophet, The*, 405, 413.
- Prue and I*, 419, 430.
- Puritan and Cavalier, Bancroft's comparison of, 111.
- 'Putnam's Magazine,' Curtis's connection with, 419; Lowell's, 457.
- 'Quaker Poet,' 256.
- Quakers, Longfellow's treatment of, in *John Endicott*, 246; relations of the Whittier family to, 257, 262, 272.
- 'Raven, The,' 196, 215.
- Red Rover, The*, 68, 71, 84, 86.
- Redskins, The*, 71, 95.
- Representative Men*, 155, 171.
- Reveries of a Bachelor*, 440, 443, 446, 450.
- Ripley, George, 153.
- Rise, The, of the Dutch Republic*, 362, 369.
- Rogers, Samuel, Bryant dedicates book to, 41.
- Round Hill School for Boys, Bancroft's connection with, 103, 104; Longfellow considers buying, 224; Motley a student at, 359.
- St. Boniface, Church of, Winnipeg, honors Whittier, 263.
- St. Botolph Club, Boston, Parkman's connection with, 383.
- Salmagundi*, 6.
- Satanstoe*, 71, 95, 96.
- 'Saturday Visitor, The,' offers prizes, for which Poe competes, 192.
- Scarlet Letter, The*, 290, 302.
- Sea Lions, The*, 71, 96.
- Seaside, The, and the Fireside*, 225, 237.
- Septimius Felton*, 292, 316.
- Seven Stories*, 441, 447.
- Shakespeare, Emerson's estimate of, 172.
- Shaw, Anna, wife of George William Curtis, 420.
- Shays's Rebellion, incident of, 102.
- Simms, William Gilmore, his advice to Poe, 201.
- Sketch Book, The*, 7, 15, 234.
- Sketches of Switzerland*, Cooper's, 94.
- Smith, Goldwin, 300.
- Smithell's Hall, Bolton-le-Moors, tradition connected with, 316.
- Snow Image, The*, 292, 301.
- Snow-Bound*, 263, 267, 278.
- Society and Solitude*, 156, 182.
- Songs of Labor*, 262, 276.
- 'Southern Literary Messenger, The,' Poe's connection with, 193.
- Spanish Student, The*, 225, 239.
- Specimen Days and Collect*, 489, 503.

# INDEX

- Spy, The*, 67, 71, 75.  
Stanley, Dean, quoted, on Motley, 364.  
Stedman, Edmund C., quoted on Poe, 212.  
Stephen, Leslie, quoted, 32.  
*Story, The, of Kennett*, 406.  
*Summer*, Thoreau's, 324, 331.  
'Sunnyside,' Irving's home, 9.  
*Supernaturalism, The, of New England*, 261, 268.  
Swedenborg, Emanuel, 172.  
Swinburne, A. C., quotation from, applied to Whitman, 495.  
Tâché, Archbishop, 263.  
*Tales of a Traveller*, 7, 18.  
*Tales of a Wayside Inn*, 226, 243.  
*Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque*, 195, 203-211.  
'Talisman, The,' Bryant's editorial work on, 39.  
*Tamerlane*, 191.  
*Tanglewood Tales*, 292, 301.  
Taylor, Bayard: birth and education, 402; travels on foot, 402; journalistic work, 403; extensive travels, 403; lists of his books, 403, 405, 406; marriages, 406; Minister to Germany, 407; death, 407; character, 407; style, 409; criticism of his poetical works, 410-414.  
Tennyson, Emerson's attitude toward, 183.  
*Tent, The, on the Beach*, 263, 272; Whittier's remark on the popularity of, 278; scheme of, 279.  
'Thanatopsis,' 36, 37, 57.  
Thoreau, Henry David: his ancestry, 321; early occupations, 321; outdoor life, 322; first book, 322; lecturing, 323; abolition sympathies, 323; acquaintance with John Brown, 323; list of his works, 324; travels, 324; death, 324; character, 325; criticism of his works, 327-333.  
*Three Books of Song*, 226, 245.  
*Three Memorial Poems*, 459, 471.  
Three Mile Point, Cooperstown, N. Y. controversy concerning, 69.  
Ticknor, George, his friendship with Prescott, 126; resigns professorship in favor of Longfellow, 224.  
Tories of the American Revolution, Irving's attitude towards, 29, 30.  
Transcendental movement, 152, 165.  
*Transformation*. See *Marble Faun*.  
*Travelling Bachelor, Notions of the Americans picked up by a*, 68, 93.  
*Trumps*, 419, 430.  
Tucker, Ellen, wife of Ralph Waldo Emerson, 149.  
*Twice-Told Tales*, 289, 298.  
*Two Admirals, The*, 71, 86.  
*Ultima Thule*, 227, 250.  
*United Netherlands, History of the*, 362, 369, 373.  
United States, Bancroft's history of, 104, 110, 113.  
'United States Literary Gazette,' Longfellow's contributions to, 222.  
United States Naval Academy at Annapolis, founding of, 105.  
'Upside Down, or Philosophy in Petticoats,' 71.  
*Vassall Morton*, 380, 381, 390.  
*Views Afloat*, 402, 404.  
*Vision of Echard, The*, 263, 281.  
*Vision of Sir Launfal, The*, 456, 468.  
*Voices of Freedom*, 261, 274.  
*Voices of the Night*, 223, 236.  
*Voyages of the Companions of Columbus*, 8, 22.  
*Walden*, 323, 324, 329, 332.  
Wansey, Henry, mention of his *Excursion to the United States*, 48.  
Ware, Henry, Emerson colleague of, 149.  
Washington, Irving's life of, 28; Lowell's tribute to, 472.  
*Water-Witch, The*, 68, 71, 85.  
*Ways of the Hour*, 71, 95.  
Wayside Inn, the, 244.  
Weed, Thurlow, quoted, 69.  
*Week, A, on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers*, 322, 324, 328, 331.



## INDEX

- Wept of Wish-ton-Wish, The*, 68, 71, 81.
- Wet Days at Edgewood*, 441, 448.
- Whewell, William, makes inquiries about *Evangeline*, 241.
- White, Maria, wife of James Russell Lowell, 455; her death, 457.
- White, T. W., his association with Poe, 193.
- Whitman, Walt: his ancestry, 485; education and early occupations, 486; journeyings in the United States, 486; publication of *Leaves of Grass*, 487; work as army nurse and government clerk, 487; life in Camden, N. J., 488; list of his writings, 488; subsidence of opposition, 489; growth of his reputation, 490; English admirers, 491; his Boston publisher threatened with prosecution, 492; criticism of his work, 492-496; his character, 504; mention of, in comparison with Longfellow, 250.
- Whitman family, 485.
- Whittier, John Greenleaf; his ancestry, 255; boyhood, 256; early writings, 257; beginning of acquaintance with Garrison, 258; attends Haverhill Academy, 258; editorial work, 259-261; beginning of anti-slavery work, 259; encounters with mobs, 260; love of country life, 260; lists of his works, 261, 263; contributions to 'Atlantic Monthly,' 262; overseer of Harvard College, 262; places of residence, 262; death, 263; character, 264; his literary art, 266; criticism of his works, 269-283; his description of Bayard Taylor, 408.
- Whittier family, 255.
- Wing-and-Wing*, 66, 71, 86.
- Winter*, Thoreau's, 324, 331.
- Wolfert's Roost*, 27.
- Wonder-Book, The*, 292, 301.
- Worsley, Philip S., quoted, 58.
- Wyandotté*, 71, 81.
- Ximenes, Mateo, his association with Irving, 25.
- Yankee, A, in Canada*, 324, 331.
- Year's Life, A*, 455.





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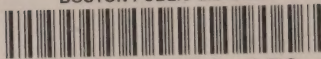








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